

The Actor's Companion

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THE ACTOR'S COMPANION

BY
CECIL FERARD ARMSTRONG

AUTHOR OF
"THE DRAMATIC AUTHOR'S COMPANION"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ARTHUR BOURCHIER, M.A.

AND CHAPTERS BY
CLARENCE DERWENT AND FREDERICK JAMES



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PREFACE

THE object of this little book, like that of its predecessor, *The Dramatic Author's Companion*, is purely practical. It is written to help those determined to adopt the stage as a profession to a fair estimate of the conditions and opportunities of stage life, and also to open their eyes to those needful qualities for success that are within everybody's reach, however great or little their talent for the actual art of acting. In short, it seeks to emphasise the value of common sense in this, as in all other professions.

The author, in his attempt to examine the profession he loves with a fair and impartial eye, has perhaps laid more stress upon the pitfalls that would-be actors are likely to set for themselves than those that will be set for them by others; but he has tried to practise

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his own ideal of criticism, and not to forget to water the flowers, whilst uprooting the weeds. Someone once said to an actor, "Tell me, Mr So-and-so, is the stage *good*?" To which the actor replied, "Are you good?" "Oh!" was the reply, "I do my best, but I suppose I am a mixture." "Exactly," said the actor. "So is the stage."

And it is a mixture that has done very many folk a lot of good, amongst them, it is to be hoped, your humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

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INTRODUCTION

IN introducing this little book to the public, I should like to say that I am not, by any means, endorsing *all* the statements and opinions that may appear therein ; but I am most heartily in agreement with the author's main contention, that there are very many things, things which are within everybody's reach, however much or little of the actual talent for acting they may possess, which should be acquired by those anxious to adopt the stage as a profession. And, as I have already said publicly elsewhere, these things, especially the arts of speaking, walking, dancing, and, if possible, singing, should to some extent be acquired and mastered by every individual who presents himself at a manager's office and asks for work. I agree with the author that the answer to the ques-

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tion "What can you do?" should be something more definite than the timid "I think I can act," or "My friends think I can act." Facilities for acquiring these accomplishments are now very much more plentiful than they were in my early days, when we had to learn everything in the face of the public. Sarah Thorne, the great, in fact almost the only, teacher at that time, had even been known to make her pupils rehearse on the beach at Margate, when time was precious and opportunities were scarce! But though that was undoubtedly a good school, it had not the advantages possessed by many at the present day, especially the Academy of Dramatic Art founded by Sir Herbert Tree.

I am also in agreement with the author when he points out the thousand and one considerations, other than mere proficiency in the art of acting, that are necessary to ensure success on the stage—I mean the attributes of common sense and common tact. At a time when a great deal is written and said on the more attractive and larger-looking aspects of our profession,

Introduction

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little seems to be written about the minor, but equally important details, the practical considerations which every actor has to face. Thus it seems to me that this little book should supply a real want, and I wish it all the success of its predecessor, *The Dramatic Author's Companion*. The author, to my own knowledge, has had some years' experience, and occupied a position on the stage which should well qualify him to write upon the subjects which he has chosen.

ARTHUR BOURCHIER.

21st October 1911.

The Actor's Companion

CHAPTER I

WHY GO ON THE STAGE?

"WHY do I want to be an actor?" That is the question for the young aspirant after histrionic honours to ask himself; nor, if he is honest with himself, will he find it altogether an easy one to answer. A better way to put it would be, "Do I really want to act?" There may be a vast difference between wanting to be an actor and wanting to act! Not long ago I peeped into one of those horrible institutions known as confession albums. Most of the "confessions" were written by young aspirants for the stage, and the answer to the question "What is your ambition?" was the same in nearly every case, namely, "To be a star"! As far

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as I can remember, not one single individual had written "To be an actor," or "To learn how to act"!

On the surface the difference may not appear great, but it is so underneath. And why this insane ambition to be a "star"? What is the attraction? Is it the monetary reward? If so, the sooner that illusion is dispelled the better. The financial rewards for actors, even at the top of the tree, are not great, though they appear so for the reason that actors' salaries are paid by the week. A hundred pounds a week sounds like five thousand a year or more, but the one or two actors who get it will tell you that it doesn't feel much like it. Very few artists, however eminent, are fortunate enough to be in work all the year round. They are fortunate indeed if their engagements average thirty-five or forty weeks in the year, year in and year out. Well, you may say four thousand a year is not so bad. Not at all; but the actor's is an expensive profession and much in the limelight, and when a man is visibly climbing up the golden stairs, with many of his poorer brethren crying out from

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below, it is not easy to keep down the "exes." Moreover, the working years of an actor's life, at any rate when he can command such sums as that, are comparatively few. Of course there are exceptions, and there are instances of perennial youth, male and female, on the stage; but they are the exceptions, and this little book is not written for them. Its circulation would indeed be small if it were. No, look at it which way you like, the rewards of an actor's life are not great, and there are many more stones than plums. But what about payment in kind? "Aye, there's the rub!" that is what dazzles. The name enblazoned in fiery letters across the theatre over the front entrance, the applause when you "come on," the crowd round the stage door, the requests for autographs (such a nuisance, these autograph hunters), the knighthood looming in the distance, and the applause of the present—that is the attraction, the bait that lures so many to destruction. I dare venture the remark that for every one actor on the London stage or in the provinces to-day who is there for the legitimate reason that he loves his art and

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must express himself in that way, there are at least a hundred who are there for illegitimate and extraneous reasons.

It is not difficult to tell which is which. The latter kind are always grumbling, and are as persistent in attributing their own failure to bad luck as in ascribing the successes of other folks to good. That there can be any lack of skill on their own part, or presence of it on another's, does not seem to enter their minds, or, according to them, the minds of managers on the look-out for material.

The latter kind, too, can be distinguished, though it is a more difficult task. The compressed lips, the steady eyes, the sad or bright smile, the eagerness to seize every opportunity, and the utter absence of any grumbling—for at least they are happy in doing the thing they want to do—are to be found if you look for them. And managers do look for them.

It is to this latter class that this little book is dedicated, though it is to be hoped that the former may find in these pages a profitable warning.

To begin with, before deciding to set his

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foot upon the theatrical ladder, I should advise the aspirant to have a good look at the bottom rungs. Do not be content simply with only looking at the top, that is up above the clouds where the sun is always shining. Once your foot is on the ladder, then, if you like, keep your eyes glued to the top. It may make a painful journey more pleasant ; at the same time there is danger of your arriving there with muddy boots if you don't look down sometimes. But before setting out look well, and look again. Then, having done that, you can again look at the top ; and shade your eyes from the dazzling glare of the sun, and look carefully. Try to realise the position of the popular actor, in private as well as in public life. You will find he has very little time or opportunity for private life of any description. His days are spent in study and his nights in work. He is tied by the leg to the town, with little hope of being able to live a regular country life, or indulge extensively in rural or seaside pursuits if his tastes run that way. Of travelling he may have plenty, but it will generally be, at any rate until towards the end of his life, only partly

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for pleasure. Excepting for an occasional sea voyage, he will always come to rest in a city. Visions of peaceful valleys, wild heights, and grand mountain scenery will fly like desert mirages past the windows of his train with bewildering and tantalising rapidity, and he may sometimes find himself wishing that he is other than what he is.

Then, when he has achieved his ambition and is at the top of the tree, he will, probably for the first time, begin to realise the drawbacks as well as the advantages of that exposed position. Someone once said that a public man is public property, which sounds very nice and flattering, but it probably doesn't feel very pleasant.

These are some of the disadvantages of an actor's life. It has, of course, its compensating advantages, but they are not very numerous or very compensating. First and foremost, of course, comes his love for his art. If he really enjoys acting for its own sake, that will be an ever-present solace, if he gets plenty to do. And he must see to it that he does. If other people do not give him enough, he can always give himself

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some. Then, if he has anything of the Bohémian in him, which he probably will have, he will enjoy living for long stretches on nothing or less than nothing a week. And when in funds he will enjoy the little shilling dinners or threepenny lunches he is able to stand himself and his friends. He will not be overcome with shame at the sight of a pawnbroker's, but will realise that it is a very much more dignified method of "raising the wind" than borrowing from friends as badly-off as himself.

And when success comes his way, he will find that the same sort of amusements, on a slightly more expensive scale, will still be the order of the day. His little dinners and luncheons may run to pounds instead of pence; his little half-day trips to the country may be made in a motor-car instead of in a motor-'bus, or the underground, or a penny steamer. But the nature of the amusements will be the same, and if a man is to enjoy the life of an actor, he must be of the kind who finds happiness in the society of his fellow-men.

He may, indeed, find his recreation in

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reading and literary pursuits, but the stage is scarcely the life for an outdoor man, a student of nature in its other than human phases.

Other aspects of the stage as a profession will be more fully dealt with in the final chapter of this book, but perhaps enough has been said to set the aspirant a-thinking and prevent him taking his leap absolutely in the dark.

CHAPTER II

HOW TO GET ON THE STAGE

HAVING answered the momentous question to his own satisfaction, and being still determined to go upon the stage, the next question that the aspirant will ask himself will probably be, "How am I to get there?" But that is just what it should not be. Rather should it be, "What is the necessary equipment? What ought I to be able to do ere presenting myself at the stage door?" Pat may come the answer, "Act, of course!" and then, perhaps, "Well, I can do that ; all my friends say I can, and I have proved it by my performance as David Garrick in the Charles Wyndham Amateur Dramatic Society." So, maybe, he presents himself to a manager with that and a sheaf of press notices as his credentials. Curiously enough, the

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manager is not the slightest bit impressed, and bows the aspirant out with the assurance that he will bear him in mind: which he does so effectually that the two never meet again!

There are certain qualifications with which every actor should be equipped, at any rate to some extent. I say every actor, but no harm would be done if everybody else were. No one should present themselves at a stage door without being able to walk, talk, sing, dance, and fence a little, any more than one would present oneself in the city without a certain proficiency in the three R's. When a manager asks what you can do and you are able to answer, "I can recite," or "I can sing and dance," he is very much more impressed than if you look rather sheepish and reply, "M-my friends think I can act." Whatever line of business you may elect to go in for, these accomplishments will all come in useful. Perhaps there is no profession that makes such a demand upon one's different faculties as does the stage, and no author more than Shakespeare. Sooner or later, probably sooner, you are bound to

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appear in a Shakespeare play, and the more humble the capacity the more varied will be demands upon your faculties. So make up your mind to learn all you can about these different things, things in most of which we can all become proficient to a certain extent. Nor is there any great difficulty about learning them. They are taught gratis or for purely nominal fees in some sort of institute in every town, probably every village, in the kingdom. In addition to this there are nurseries and academies of the art of acting springing up on every hand. It is no longer necessary for an actor to learn the rudiments of his trade before the public, who have paid to see his struggles, and under the tuition of a manager who has perhaps had to learn the same way. There is no longer any excuse for such a state of things, and were I in the position of an employer, I should most certainly give the preference to an aspirant who had taken the trouble to acquire some qualifications, other than those which he considered himself endowed with at birth.

Another advantage of these schools is that

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it is easier to get one's footing on the stage after having gone through the course at one or other of them, for gradually managers are becoming accustomed to look towards them for their raw material. Perhaps they find it less raw that way. This brings us to the next step in the aspirant's career, namely, getting his foot upon the boards.

Of course, getting the Gold Medal at the Academy of Dramatic Art founded by Sir Herbert Tree is, in some ways, a good introduction, but it is not an easy one to get, and it would be a bad thing for the profession if that, or, indeed, any kind of surpassing scholastic proficiency were the *only* avenue. There have been in all ages geniuses who were no good at that sort of thing, and have no gold medals to their credit, and sometimes nothing but a long succession of irritating failures, followed by rebuffs from teachers doing their utmost to discourage the pursuance of what seemed a fruitless task. Some folk appear to have an intuitive knowledge of all that others would learn at a school; others do not mature until after years of toil. Sarah Bernhardt is said to have

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been considered a hopeless case by the Comédie Française, who are also said to have turned their noses up at the great Coquelin Aîné, because, forsooth, his own nose turned up; and had it not been for the astuteness of one of the members, who saw how such an organ might be turned to good account, one of the greatest actors they have ever turned out might have been turned out in quite a different sense of the word.

In spite of occasional mistakes such as this, however, the schools of acting have their uses, and their introduction into this country is a great matter for congratulation. We will suppose, however, that our aspirant has passed through his initial training, and whilst acquitting himself creditably, has made no special mark and not been singled out by any visiting manager for the offer of a "job." His love for his art has not been a whit dulled by all the hard work and drudgery he has had to go through, and he is as determined as ever to go on with it.

The next question is, how to get on to the

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professional stage? And here is where so many young people make their first mistake. They buzz around among their influential friends and furnish themselves with introductions to all and sundry at the top of the tree. What is the good of that? You may only worry some busy man out of five minutes of his time and start your career with having created a bad impression. The great man will probably indulge you and himself in a little homily that you have probably heard daily since you first announced your intention of going on the stage. Then say you, "I can understand father talking such rot, because he doesn't know what he's talking about, but that Sir C——W—— or Sir H——B—— T—— can do the same, passes my comprehension." Then slowly your comprehension begins to work, and it all dawns on you in a flash. "Of course it is to Sir So-and-so's interest to keep rising talent from the stage, not to answer the younger generation when it knocks at the door." After that your mind is made up. You *will* go upon the stage, and nothing that Sir Thing-um-a-bob or anyone else says will prevent you. And off

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you go, and then on you go; and perhaps years and years and years after other things will dawn on you, and you will find that you have been made a desperate fool of by a thing you will call first luck, then fate, until the truth will no longer remain hidden, and you will see that it is you and no one else that have made a fool of yourself, that it was your own conceit that told you it was to Sir So-and-so's interest to keep you off the stage. But you may be a big man by then, and perchance may seek him out to apologise to him, perhaps only to find that you can water his grave with your tears.

But never mind. After this happens you may find yourself well on the way to become a great actor. But, you may ask, was this unpleasant experience necessary in order to become a great actor? It evidently was for you. But it need not have been if you had stopped to think; and thinking has got to be done sooner or later, so why not do it sooner? A little thought will convince you that a method far more likely to bear fruit is to begin by making the acquaintance of some-

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one nearer the foot of the ladder, someone with plenty of time to spare, whose anxiety to impart what he knows is only equalled by that to impart what he doesn't. But you will not have much difficulty in sifting the wheat from the chaff, if you are a sensible fellow, which you will be, if you take this course!

From the acquaintanceship of a small-part man to that of the call-boy, or even the assistant stage-manager, is not a giddy leap, nor is the transit from the assistant to his "boss," the stage-manager. It may possibly cost some time and hospitality, but what is that when folk will pay hundreds of pounds to get their footing at the Bar, or on the Stock Exchange? The stage-manager captured, the next thing to do is to get a footing on his stage, and that will not be difficult if you keep your eyes open and wait your opportunity. One fine day the chance of a "walk on" will come along, and, hey presto! the rest will be a "walk over"! Nothing is easier to accomplish than the right thing—at the right time. The thing is done! You are on the stage. Your foot is on the ladder, and nothing is

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likely to stop your ascent if you go on as you have begun.

Another way of getting your oar in is through the medium of the theatrical agent. This method may be quite a good one, but do not attempt to use it unless you have, so to speak, "got the goods." Never go an agent as a mere amateur ; pay no heed to alluring advertisements in some theatric papers offering to secure good positions for such. If you do, you may have the misfortune to get a job and find yourself landed in some dreadful little company touring at the other end of nowhere, with no kind of opportunities to learn anything but the one particular job you will be set to do, and will probably still be doing at the end of your life. I repeat, *never* go to an agent, any more than you would, or should, to a manager without some sort of professional equipment or training. Have something up your sleeve that you can do, and you can show you can do.

A young man once went to a manager who was sending a company out on tour, and asked for a small part, or even a

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walk on. "What can you do?" said the manager. "I think I can act," said the young man, "and I know I can use a typewriter and write shorthand." He got the part.

As to the actual advantages of employing an agent, though often very useful indeed for pantomime and provincial work, as far as London is concerned they are of rather a negative quality. They may save a certain amount of trouble; but if you keep your eyes open and look about you, there is no reason why you yourself should not be quite as efficient an agent as anyone else. Then if you do get a job, you will save your commission.

The objectionable thing about agents is the attitude that most of them adopt. "What can we do for you?" is almost invariably their tune; and they will treat you as if they were doing you a favour in getting you work, whereas the benefit is, to say the least of it, mutual. Many an actor has got on very successfully without an agent, but I never heard of any agent who got on without actors!

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In the music-halls it is different. There, there seems to be an arrangement between the managers and the agents, and the latter appear to be a necessary evil.

But if you do employ an agent, let your relations be purely business ones, and cut short any palaver about favours or obligations, and avoid the secret commission man and the "itching palm" like poison. You will lose nothing by so doing.

Certain theatres have sometimes been open to receive a certain limited number of aspirants and teach them their business on payment of a premium; but this method was looked at rather askance, partly owing, doubtless, to the ridiculous secrecy and furtiveness with which it was done. But surely there is no reason why this should be so. In any other profession there are such things as apprentices—why not on the stage? I have no wish to defend the paying amateur, but there is all the difference between him and the genuine apprentice sincerely anxious to adopt the stage as a profession; and in former days, before the institution of Schools of Acting, it was surely the most reasonable

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method of receiving novices. But it is happily no longer necessary for the actor to learn the rudiments of his art before the public, and this method of *entrée* is better avoided.

CHAPTER III

HOW TO GET ON ON THE STAGE

BEFORE setting out our actor (once on the stage, in any capacity, he will feel he is entitled to call himself that) will, if he is a wise general, survey the field upon which he hopes to conquer, and get a look at the forces arrayed against him.

The field is perhaps as rough as any profession has to offer, hard and stony, with few cooling streams and little or no vegetation of the right sort, though there is plenty of the rotten rank kind. There is little shelter from the pitiless fire of the enemy. The ground is full of snares, seen and unseen, and of these, those that are seen seem to be the most deadly. Some of them are so very fair to look upon! They are the enemy's first and perhaps most effective line

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of defence and of offence too. Bars, beer, baccy, and other things are all part of the scheme. This book is not a sermon, and I do not intend to preach, but it is no use ignoring the fact that learning the very difficult art of acting is going to take up lots of one's time, and neither bars, beer, baccy, or the other things are, as a rule, permitted on the stage during rehearsal time, which is the place and period where the young actor will learn most, if he keeps his eyes and ears open.

The theatre is like a race-course. To it are wont to drift all the riff-raff of humanity, as well as the highest in the land. It is of this riff-raff that the beginner must beware, for even if he may not be one of them himself, there is sometimes danger of one or more hanging on to his coat-tails and keeping him back. As hinted in the foregoing chapter, there are hundreds and hundreds on the stage who can't act. What is more, *they know they can't*. Of course there is another class—those that think they can but can't; but it is the knowing ones that are the most dangerous. They have got on to the stage

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and now are unable to get off it. They have got to earn their living, and, as a certain lady more famous for her beauty than her histrionic ability once remarked at rehearsal, "If one can't act one must do something!" By hook or by crook these people have got to keep the pot boiling, and it is generally done by crook. Why I mention this ragged army at all is because it is one of the things that seemingly have to be contended with in the theatre; but at the same time there is nothing to be feared from it, and the way to defeat it is really quite simple. Have nothing to do with it. Give it the go-by. Do not attempt to mount the ladder in any but the legitimate way, for even if you do, and get to the top, it will take you all your time, and rob you of your peace of mind, to maintain your slippery position.

There is only one legitimate method of getting to the top, and that is by learning to act. Do not be under the impression that because you have finished your course at this or that school, with this or that company, that you are a finished actor, and have only to wait for your opportunity. With acting,

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as with all other arts, a lifetime is not sufficient in which to learn it, and the actor goes on learning up to the day of his death, whenever that may be. In one sense of the word there is no such thing as a finished actor, but in the sense of a man who has mastered the technique of his calling, there is; and to do that as thoroughly and as quickly as possible should be your aim.

The type of young actor that a manager likes to have in his company is the young man who keeps the actors' and perhaps everybody's eleventh commandment, "Mind your own business!" And the young actor's business is to do what he is told, no matter whether it appears to him wrong or not. The lesson of obedience is *most important* to him, and though he may not believe what I say, it will do him far more good at this stage of his career to do a thing in what he knows to be the wrong way because he is told by his producer to do it that way, than it would to do it his own way, even though that were artistically a better rendering. As fine a definition of an actor as anyone could have is, perhaps, an

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actor who can do whatever is wanted. If you were to ask Irene Vanbrugh to do something for you the right way, the wrong way, or any other way, you would find she could do them all. But there are those who could only do it wrong, or only do it right. Neither kind are much use, except to have plays written round them.

Do not be for ever criticising your elders. They may be wrong—they generally are. At the same time, you will learn far more by spotting their virtues than their mistakes. And it is surprising what a lot of the former even the worst of them have, when you find out their point of view and what they are driving at. So-and-so may be a rotten actor, but the fact remains that he succeeds night after night in keeping large audiences extremely interested, and it requires some sort of capability to do that. And capability of any kind is generally worth looking at. There is a certain young lady who has attained great eminence in the musical comedy line. It is the custom to hint that she owes her success to her pretty little voice and pretty little feet and pretty little

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face, rather than to any special ability on her own part. I once had the good fortune to watch her rehearsing for a little part in which she had neither to sing, dance, nor look prettier than she could help. From the very outset her handling of the little part demonstrated very great capability, and it was obvious that here, at any rate, Art was the handmaid of her mistress Nature.

Managers are very apt to watch and notice, though some may not believe it, the conduct of young actors at a rehearsal. Those who are never in evidence, except when their own part is being rehearsed, and even then are not always standing by ready for their cues, do not create a good impression. An occasional cigarette at the stage door is all very well, but it does not do to be smoking in the passage all the time one is not rehearsing one's own part. Too much chattering in the stalls, and too much anxiety to get away the moment you have finished your "bit," do not pass unnoticed. The fact is, managers and producers are human like everyone else, and if you do not take much

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interest in your own work, you might at least show some in theirs.

I have heard a manager say, "I shan't have that fellow in my theatre again, he takes no interest in the play or rehearsals beyond his own little bit"; and perhaps in after years that actor has complained of never having had an opportunity of showing what he could do. If only actors would realise the chances they sometimes get of showing what they *cannot* do, and how quick they are to avail themselves of them, we might have fewer grumblers and failures and more successes.

On the other hand, there are those whose active interest in rehearsals has been rewarded by a small part in the next production, or a permanent billet at the theatre, an event which their companions, and perhaps they themselves, have never ceased to attribute to "good luck"!

From all this it will be seen that the actor's worst enemy may be, and generally is, himself. But he is not peculiar or unique in this. In fact, the sooner he realises that he is not peculiar or unique in any way, the

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better for him. The deadliest weapon in this enemy's whole battery is self-consciousness, and this book would be worth writing if one could give some sort of certain remedy for that evil alone. One of the most horrible things about it is that it always seems to attack us at the moment when it matters most—not, as some may think, when the curtain is up and the audience in front, but rather at a rehearsal before a manager. And somehow we are never able to bring ourselves to believe that the sympathetic manager sees what our trouble is and understands; but he does, and if we battle manfully against it, will see that too. But it is certainly uncomfortable to feel one is making a fool of oneself! At the same time, there is no surer sign that a person is after what he really wants than if he does not mind risking that.

This brings one to another serious consideration, namely, the opportunities that the stage offers. Here again we come up against something about which there seems to be much misconception. That opportunities are few and far between is a very favourite and

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popular remark, but it is nevertheless an untrue one, and there are those who have been fortunate enough to discover this fact. The stage, just like any other profession, teems with opportunities and chances to those that are willing to believe it is so, and to keep on the look-out for and avail themselves of them. The number of disappointed actors going about grumbling that they have never had an opportunity of showing the public what they can do is legion. But could they with equal truth say that they had had no such opportunity with the managers in whose hands it lies to give them their chance, as they call it? It is not generally the opportunity that is wanted, but the ability to recognise it when it is there. And once you are on the stage it is always there. An "extra gentleman" once told me that his one desire was that they would give him a part in which he could show the public what he could do. In the meantime, by merely "walking on" in a scene, he showed them very effectually what he couldn't! He would not, or could not attend to what was being said on the stage; he had evidently taken

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no pains to find out what the scene was all about, consequently every movement, expression or gesture that he did make was completely out of the picture and not at all indicative of the state of mind he was supposed to be in. The fact of the matter was that he was thinking so much of the wonderful part in which he hoped some day to "show them what he could do," that he forgot all about the present. To paraphrase the Psalmist, "The eyes of the fool were at the end of the earth"! No actor needs any better opportunity than the one of being employed in *any* capacity, however small. Upon this point and upon the importance of "thinking" parts, I shall have more to say in the next section. Perhaps enough has already been said to fulfil the object of the present one, namely, to point out to actors that things are not nearly so bad or so hopeless as they are sometimes represented to be, or as they may appear on the surface.

Undoubtedly the stage is an over-crowded profession, but it is not by any means over-crowded with folk who can act, or who thoroughly know their business, and that

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should be the consoling fact. For to suppose that inability can crush out ability is as ridiculous as to imagine that the darkness can put out the light.

"Mind your own business" and "Do not be late" are the two commandments the actor must learn to obey ; and the latter is, in some ways, the more important. To be late is the one unpardonable crime of the theatre. I once knew a stage-manager who, when saying good night to any member of his company "after the show," always added the words, "Don't be late." Once an actor, seeing no special occasion for the observation, asked "When?" "Never," said the stage-manager.

It is a curious fact, by the way, that the lesson of punctuality so thoroughly imbibed upon the stage so seldom reaches beyond the stage door. Actors as a class seem curiously lax and unpunctual in the affairs of everyday life. The fame of an actor who always kept his appointments to the minute would soon spread, especially among managers and people that count.

An actor, too, who never grumbles in the dressing-room either at his luck, his managers,

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or the hundred and one things outside of himself, soon gets a very enviable "behind the scenes" reputation, and finds no difficulty in getting "shops" well within his capacity.

All things considered, therefore, "getting on" on the stage is not really so difficult or so hopeless a task as many would have us believe; but, as in most other walks of life, it requires something more than mere proficiency in the actual work itself, although that is, of course, the primary consideration. Actors and actresses may comfort themselves with the thought that whatever be the circumstances or conditions under which they work, ultimate success depends, in the first place, on themselves alone.

CHAPTER IV

"THE DIFFICULT ART OF ACTING"

IT is with some diffidence that the author writes on this subject. Teaching, criticising, and performing are three different things which need not necessarily go together; but at any rate the master of an art demonstrates the fact that he has some knowledge to impart. The writer has never, to anybody else's entire satisfaction at any rate, demonstrated the fact that he can act, but he has had, perhaps, exceptionally good opportunities of watching others do so, not only when playing their parts before an audience, but when studying them and building them up at rehearsal. He has seen those who were born great, those who achieved greatness, and those who have had greatness thrust upon them. He has also seen those who were born failures, those who

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achieved failure, but *never* those who had failure thrust upon them.

The results of these observations may be of some use to somebody. They have certainly been so to the observer.

One of the first things I noticed in the theatre was the great attention paid to and the enormous importance of detail. Of course one very soon saw how this must be so ; what seem to the uninitiated the minor considerations of a play were only minor in point of size, like notes in a piece of music or figures in a sum. In importance there was little to choose between the various ingredients. For that reason the man who had one line to say was the centre of attention whilst he was saying it, and sometimes when he wasn't. Small parts may seem to fade into insignificance when once the curtain is up, because their significance is not immediately felt, but they do not do so at rehearsal. This fact should be very encouraging to the young actor, who may rest assured that his first steps will not go unappreciated or unobserved. But small speaking parts are by no means the foot of the ladder. The parts

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played by the “extra ladies and gentlemen,” walkers on, supers—“thinking parts,” as they are cynically named—are the first steps. A thinking part may be a very important one, and offer an actor as good an opportunity of showing what he can do as he can possibly want.

In most of Shakespeare's plays, for instance, many thinking parts are on the stage practically throughout the play. If the actors playing them do their work properly, they have as big parts as any of the principals, and very often bigger, and parts which may afford them golden opportunities. But how seldom they avail themselves of these opportunities! To play a large thinking part properly requires a great deal of thinking, and acting of a very difficult and somewhat unusual kind too. An actor who knows how to listen, and conveys the fact to the audience that he is hearing something for the first time, instead of the hundredth, or two hundredth, as the case may be, is not so frequently met with as he should be, or would be if ten per cent. of the extra gentlemen and ladies now on

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the stage did their work properly and made the most of the chances they so often affect to despise. To play a walk-on part properly should entail at the least a very careful study of the whole scene, if not the whole play, in which the part appears; but how seldom is this done. Nor is the "extra gentleman" always the only offender in this respect, for the present writer has more than once seen a principal drop the effect of a whole scene by doing his "thinking" so badly that it was obvious to the audience and everyone else that he did not know what he was supposed to be thinking about! If he were thinking about anything, it was his own little bit, and then only in relation to himself, not to the scene or his fellow-actors.

While on the subject of "extra gentlemen" and "thinking parts," one is tempted to hope that the day is not far distant when the old-fashioned "super" will have become a thing of the past, and his place taken by intelligent and well-educated actors and actresses bent on succeeding in their profession. Surely it would be no bad investment if half the money that is now so often lavished upon a

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lot of useless and ineffective finery in the way of scenery, property, and dresses were spent on paying the salaries, never very large, of efficient young actors and actresses only too glad of getting their oars in in London. Imagine how it would help the scene and lighten the producers' work if everyone in the crowd of the Buckingham scene in *Henry VIII.*, the trial scene in the *Merchant of Venice*, or the Forum scene in *Julius Cæsar* knew all about the play in general and their own part in particular. We lately had a hint of what this might mean in the Forum scene produced by Granville Barker and played by a company of experienced actors at the Coronation gala performance at His Majesty's Theatre. Of course they had the advantage of a great producer, but he would be the first to acknowledge his indebtedness to his material. A Frenchman, they say, can make a salad out of nothing, but he will make a better one out of something; and so will the play-producer if he has the material.

To a certain extent this state of things exists nowadays. Most stage crowds are eked out with a few responsible actors and

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actresses, but there is surely no reason why the system should not be carried still further.

Our aspirant has now, perhaps, begun to realise to some extent the work and opportunities that lie before him once he has set foot on the stage, and will see that he has no time to grumble or look about for grand opportunities, but must take those that come to hand. He is like a dog in a barn with a lot of rats. If he spends too much time hunting for a big one, or just taking a bite at several, they will probably all escape.

After thinking parts come "small parts," which, in some ways, the actor will find easier work; indeed, were it not that a small part generally has a large understudy attached to it, it would be the easiest job in a theatre; but there aren't any easy ones! Rehearsals are the hardest part of the small-part man's work. To begin with, he is, as a rule, though quite unintentionally so, at variance with his producer. The points of view are not often the same. The producer regards the play as a whole, and sees the little part in its right proportion. To the actor, especially if it be his first part, the

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importance of it is apt to be exaggerated, and the rest of the play fades into the background. To make matters worse, some kind friend may come round and tell him after the first rehearsal that the part “stood out”—a thing it had got no business to do. If the actor is stupid enough to swallow this sort of thing, there is every chance that he, but not the part, may stand out at the next rehearsal. Adjusting the relationship between the part and the player may be a somewhat painful process to both the producer and the produced, but there is no need why it should be, if the actor will forearm himself by carefully studying the play as a whole. Of course he may not get the chance of doing this, as there are some managers who will not allow the play to be read to the company, or the company to read the play. I suppose they know their own business best, but no good work was ever done in the dark. The ideal thing, surely, would be to give everyone in the cast a copy of the play to read, without letting them know what part they were cast for.

Another trap that small-part men seem

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apt to fall into is that of ceasing to act the moment they cease to talk. This, of course, is fatal. An actor should start playing his part a moment or two before he steps on to the stage, and not cease playing it for a still longer time after he comes off.

Playing a part is like sailing a ship. You must keep her going whatever happens. To stop for a moment is fatal.

The small-part actor comes into direct contact, perhaps for the first time in his life, with his audience. He has faced it often enough before, and probably seen a very great deal too much of it; for it is not easy to avoid scanning the audience when one is sitting still for a long time in a scene. At the same time, it may safely be said that the first time an actor actually comes into what might be called physical contact with his audience is when he first plays a speaking part. He is face to face with the fact that he has got something to give and must find out the best way to give it. His producer will, of course, have put him in the way of it and shown him what he, the producer, wants; but the moment the curtain is up the

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actor will find that it is up to him to make the best use of his instruction and show the audience what the producer wants. He will find himself alone, left absolutely to his own devices. He has learnt how to steer the ship, and is now, even if only for a moment of time, in sole charge. There is no captain on the bridge to shout to him what he is or is not to do.

“Forget your audience,” some will say. “Forget that they are there.” That is no use. Never forget that they are there; you couldn’t if you tried, so it doesn’t matter. Watch the helmsman of a ship: does he forget that great green wave that looks as if it were going to swamp the ship? Not a bit of it! But does he look as if he knew it was there? Very seldom. He generally looks as if his thoughts were miles away, safe at rest in the haven to which he is steering. That should be, I think, the attitude of the actor in the face of his audience. Never let them for one moment see that you know they are there, but do not ignore them mentally. On the contrary, you have got to understand them, or the chances are they

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will not understand you. A great play, like any other great work of art, should not only be a joy for ever, but a joy for all, and should have something in it to meet everybody's needs. I doubt if anybody, even Shakespeare himself, understands the whole of *Hamlet*, but practically everyone finds something in it to interest them. Different audiences are like different people. One time the house has a sense of humour; another time it hasn't. One time Mrs Grundy is sitting on it; another time it is sitting on Mrs Grundy. The actor, if he knows his job, has to exhibit his wares in a fashion that will, to a certain extent, commend them to everyone.

A good sportsman told me once that the first lesson a rider must learn is not to be afraid of his horse. And there is only one place where that lesson can really be learnt, and that is on the horse's back. It is the same with acting. An actor must learn not to be afraid of his audience, and the audience and experience alone can teach him the lesson. Of course there are those who seem to step on the stage already equipped with

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the necessary confidence ; but they are very rare. It is for this reason that no manager in his senses will allow an absolute beginner to play a big part, or, for the matter of that, a part at all. I have seen a play performed by a company of young actors, all of whom had talent, but none much experience. The result was that whilst they acquitted themselves most creditably in very many ways, and showed heaps of talent and natural aptitude, they lacked the necessary force required to make the play go for *all* it was worth. In theatre parlance, they “dropped” certain scenes. Their experience of audiences was not sufficient to tell them how interested their audience really was, and consequently they rushed over things they might have safely taken their time over. The value of pause and the power of silence on the stage is enormous. It can scarcely be over-estimated. Few actors understand the value of a pause better than Sir Herbert Tree does, and none the power of silence better than Hawtrey. Many of our players know how and when to act, but how few of them know how and when not to act? In view of

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what I have previously said about "keeping the ship sailing," this may sound contradictory, but it is not really so. There are frequent times when the actor must subordinate himself entirely to the scene, let the scene, as it were, play him. The young actor, by looking out for these occasions, will find that he is doing himself far more good than being continually on the look-out for showy bits. I would again enjoin him to watch Hawtrey if he gets a chance, for no one understands more thoroughly when to stop acting than that admirable actor. At the same time, those who have had the privilege of watching him rehearse have soon seen that it is not so simple as it looks, and does not consist merely in sitting still doing nothing. The whole thing is very, very carefully thought out, and yet the effect of spontaneity and effortlessness is produced. To do nothing well on the stage often seems to be the last lesson that many actors learn. Surely it should be the first. We have all got to learn to be nothing before we can be something, and to do nothing before we can do anything. Whilst we are on the subject

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of Hawtrey it is worth while to pause and examine another peculiarity of his art. You will sometimes hear it said of him that he does not really act, he is always himself. Well, this takes some doing, and is also not so easy as it looks! Like many another actor, Hawtrey fits his own personality to the parts he portrays, or perhaps it would be more correct to say he fits the parts he portrays to his personality. This is one class of acting, perhaps not the highest class, but one that demands great gifts not only of the art of acting, but of personal charm and plasticity. Given these, it may be the easiest way to get to the top of the tree, but it is not by any means an easy one for all that. The tyro will soon find out that to be even himself on the stage requires a lot of doing. Here again, perhaps, one has to learn to be oneself before one can hope to be anyone else, though of course there are those with an inborn gift for character acting.

This brings us to the two great divisions of acting, known professionally as “character” and “straight.” Character parts may be said to be those in which the actor or

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actress has to assume characters quite outside of himself, his own age or generation, or characters that have some strongly marked characteristics that belong to them in particular, and are not of a kind that is common among men. "Straight" parts may be great parts: indeed, some of the greatest parts are the straightest. It seems to me they are well defined as those parts in which the actor may employ and not endeavour to hide his own personality. Hamlet, Benedict, Orlando, Charles Surface, Henry V. are all straight parts. Hamlet, indeed, is the straightest of the lot, for does he not represent the whole of humanity, the average man? True, the average man is not a prince, nor in a princely position, and does not often have greatness thrust upon him. But if he did, would not he behave in much the same tentative, experimental way that Hamlet does? And it is not to his discredit that he experiments and shilly-shallies: rather to his credit, for he sees all round the question so clearly. It takes a well-balanced man to sit on a fence. Are not all Hamlet's queries, worries, and soliloquies our queries,

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worries, and soliloquies when something happens which sets us thinking? Hamlet, then, is surely the “straightest” part that was ever written. On the other hand, Lear, Shylock, Macbeth, Falstaff, Malvolio, Sir Peter Teazle, and 'Enery Straker are all character parts. Even those of them that do not possess strictly individual characteristics are undoubted types.

Having learnt when not to act, the next step is to learn how and when to act. To do this a careful study of the methods of some great actors, foreign as well as English, dead as well as living, is not without its advantages. The first point which one will notice for oneself, and glean from reading the lives and letters of some of the great actors of the past, is the extraordinary attention to detail that is paid by every great artist. *Nothing whatever is left to chance.* That, if anything, is the secret of success. The definition of genius as “an infinite capacity for taking pains” is known to everybody and scoffed at by most people, but it is probably the right one. The reason that it sounds cold, and hence is unpopular, is most likely

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because it produces an impression of intense laboriousness; but it need not necessarily be so. The definer said nothing about a laborious capacity, but an infinite one, which may convey quite another sense, that of extreme naturalness. The genius's capacity for taking pains is infinite because it is really effortless. Like the perfect musician or mathematician, he cannot go wrong. His senses, dramatic, musical, or mathematical, are perfectly attuned, and his tune pours forth as naturally as that of the skylark, or Shelley's poem about it. But the skylark has the advantage. He is unpremeditated. Perhaps the time will come when our art may be the same and we shall see the supreme genius in acting, writing, or music. Mathematically he already exists in America, and can give the answer straight away to any possible mathematical problem; but unfortunately he is not normal in any other respect. So much for the "cold" definition of genius. A story is told of the great Garrick which is well worth recording. During his famous visit to Paris he was out riding with the foremost French actor of the

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time. They approached a village. “Let us feign drunkenness,” said Davy. They did so: the whole village turned out and mocked the two drunken cavaliers. When they had got out of the reach of their jeers, the Frenchman turned to Garrick and asked the great actor’s opinion of his performance. “Excellent,” said Davy; “but your legs weren’t drunk!” It was evidently so. The Frenchman had acted well enough to take in a whole village, but not a man with the infinite capacity. Now there are heaps of actors like this. London is full of them, and many are the fine performances they give; but how seldom does one find one who is really “drunk in his legs,” so to speak! We see many marvellous old heads on young shoulders, and some young heads on old shoulders, performances which come out like a game of consequences or happy families.

The point is, can this infinite capacity be acquired? Personally, I believe it can. And the prescription is work! Work, work, work! A man whose opinion is of recognised value once told me that no one could turn

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out a great work of art unless the spirit moved him; and the spirit would not move him unless he worked. Moments of inspiration are, as a rule, the outcome of months of toil. From the quantity of their output alone it seems evident that nearly all the supreme geniuses of the world have been not only very hard but very regular workers. If you get into the habit of waiting for inspiration to come, a time will come when it won't turn up, and perhaps desert you. But if you make a point of going halfway to meet it, it will become your servant, and instead of the spirit moving you, you will move the spirit.

There may be those who will say that this sort of thing is all very well, but too much grinding is apt to make one mechanical. But should it? Is not that where the artist comes in? The true artist always produces the appearance of spontaneity. Coquelin's seven hundredth performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac* was as fresh, spontaneous, and moving as his first. Indeed, if anything, more so. On our own stage to-day there is no actress who builds her parts up with greater care

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than Irene Vanbrugh, and there is none who is more completely convincing or apparently spontaneous. Often you know what she is going to say before she says it—you can hear her thinking. No better tribute could be paid to any actress or actor.

Every actor should study Hamlet's directions to the players. They should also, especially actresses, possess themselves of a copy of Ellen Terry's *Story of my Life*. In it that charming lady and exquisite actress shows how even she, born practically on the stage, with every advantage that opportunity and a bounteous nature could provide, had to work herself to the bone to attain the position she now holds.

Nerves and stage fright are enemies that beset the path of the young, and often the old, actor. But if the actor is to succeed, they *must* be overcome—at any rate in so far as they have any outward effect. Hundreds of remedies, mental, moral, and physical, have been propounded and compounded as being the best for this tiresome complaint. It seems to me that the best is not to have anything to do with any of them

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if you can help it. Of course this is not so easy as it sounds, but it would certainly be more often accomplished successfully did actors not go out to meet the trouble half-way. For some reason or other most artists seem to take a pride in the possession of these drawbacks. They appear to think that it indicates "temperament," "genius," "feeling," and all sorts of attractive things; and there are many who say that every actor should be a bundle of nerves, otherwise he could never feel his part, and so on, and so on. But this is not so fine as it sounds. An actor may have as many nerves as he likes, but he must be their master if he is to be an artist. An actor once told me that the slightest unwonted sound in the audience put him off his balance for the night and prevented him doing himself justice. For anyone to consider himself an actor who is in such a condition as that seems an imposture. He is of about as much use as a sailor who is all right so long as there are no squalls about! No one has more sympathy with the terrible troubles of nervousness and self-consciousness than the present writer; at the same time

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he fully recognises that to have them in subjection is part and parcel of the actor's business. It is the same with regard to feeling your part. It sounds very well to say you always do so, and may possibly deceive and impress the unwary. But if an actor really *felt* the parts he or she were playing—well, they would not be acting, that is all. They must certainly sympathise with the part, and *appreciate* the situation in which it is placed at their full value, speaking dramatically. But this is a very different thing to feeling it. An actor must be master of his feelings, not their servant, which he very soon would be if he felt all they were supposed to be feeling. Supposing Hamlet, Macbeth, or Macduff really did that, what would become of the other actors, or the audience? Of course, the thing is ridiculous, although on the surface it sounds very well and impressive. On the other hand, some actors and actresses who very stoutly maintain that they feel everything they portray, who have more than once proved themselves people with very little feeling, at any rate for others, off the stage, for that reason

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perhaps are not particularly good at portraying sympathetic parts on. To know how to feel and to feel are not altogether the same thing. Actors have certainly got to be *capable* of feeling the parts they portray.

Imagine an actress who has to play a scene of passionate anger. As a rule it never convinces anyone, but one day something happens to upset her, and the result is a superb performance. She is not acting, she *is* in a rage. But what is the good of that? Unless something happens to put her into a temper really, she cannot portray it. A really great actor can move his audience to tears and at the same time crack a joke in an undertone with his fellow-actors. I have seen this done. I have also seen the tears streaming down an actress's cheeks in a pathetic part and the audience remain quite unmoved. This was due to the too laboured attempt to put pathos into a scene, instead of the more natural process of *bringing it out*. There is a difference between these two things. One is the wrong way and the other the right. If you really understand the meaning of what you are saying, and can really *appreciate* the

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situation yourself, you will succeed in conveying that value to the audience. Some may say that that does amount to feeling the part; but there is a difference. I do not suppose any artist could portray an emotion which he would never be capable of feeling himself. To put it simply, a sympathetic actor has got to realise the situation from the character's point of view; he will then understand and be able to portray it without actually feeling its jealousy, hate, or love, as the case may be. The whole thing requires strength of character on the part of the actor rather than so-called talent or cleverness, and a great actor must be a great man, just as a great dramatist, a great painter, or a great anything else must.

Temperament is another great stumbling-block in the young actor's path, the more so as it has been so often exalted into a position to which it is not entitled. Moreover, it is another of those things which actors are prone to meet halfway. That high-sounding business “the artistic temperament,” is as a rule nothing more or less than sheer self-indulgence and selfishness. A want of

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punctiliousness in business affairs, extravagance in money matters, inability to keep appointments, and all the rest of it, are nearly all regarded as regulation, and indeed necessary, attributes of the artistic temperament, and condoned as such. Surely nothing is further removed from the genuine artistic temperament, which likes to see *everything* well done. Carefulness is surely the handmaid of art. As previously hinted, from the size and volume of their artistic output one is almost forced to the conclusion that nearly all the supreme artists of the world must have been extraordinarily methodical fellows. Conceit is another of the attributes of the so-called artistic temperament. The would-be artist often considers himself the salt of the earth, and that he should be kept by the nation, and all the rest of it. He is generally much more like the mustard, or the pepper! As for being kept by the nation, if he is the wonderful person he imagines himself to be, he would be far more likely to be in a position to keep the nation. "Art," said a distinguished artist to the writer, "is a commonplace thing and should be treated as

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such; then we should get better artists and more of them.” Surely that is so, and anything that is worth having is within everybody’s reach in one form or another. To consider oneself an especially gifted individual amounts to considering oneself a special favourite of the gods!

The “creative faculty” so-called is another of the things of which an artist must beware. It goes hand in hand with the “artistic temperament.” The artistic faculty is not creative; in the sense that it *originates* it is imitative, reflective, selective. Only in a very limited sense can it be called creative. It may perhaps be said to create a work of art. What it really does is to construct one from the material placed at its disposal, as though it were a jig-saw puzzle. The artistic faculty is the faculty that perceives that there is some pattern at the back of all the queer little twists and wriggles of which life is composed. A painter sees sights and makes a picture of them; a musician hears sounds amid the mass of sounds; the dramatist and actor see and handle events with a view to their dramatic possibilities.

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To my sense this realisation that the artist is not really a creator—an originator would perhaps be better—is of paramount importance. Without it, the artist gets everything else out of proportion, and sees himself as something he isn't, and is rendered miserable because the world has a truer sense of his real value. This, it seems to me, is one reason why artists, and especially inferior artists, are on the whole a rather unhappy race of men. The one or two real artists it has been my good fortune to meet have, on the other hand, been extremely simple, unaffected men.

Whether this is all really so or not, the art of acting is most certainly primarily an imitative art. It is also the most primitive form of art, though music may perhaps be said to run it fairly close. Animals act. It is no uncommon thing to see a dog do so. In a sense, too, a bird produces music, but it is quite unpremeditated. There is an architectural art amongst animals too; but these are both unself-conscious. Acting would seem to be the first *conscious* form

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of art that appears in the animal, and, perhaps for that very reason, the lowest. This should be a healthy reflection for the young actor, and help him to get his sense of proportion right.

As in play-writing so in acting, the architectural plan and method of the modern theatre impose certain mechanical and technical limitations and considerations. There is a right way to turn and a wrong way to turn, a right and a wrong knee to go down on. At the same time, it is not much use to give more definite instruction, for these things vary with the mechanical conditions of the theatre. In order to master them properly and keep abreast with them, the actor must acquaint himself thoroughly with his “show-box”! And, having mastered them, he has yet to appear natural and look as if they were not there! Here he is up against the same difficulty as the dramatist. He has to appear thoroughly natural under artificial conditions. The audience are to be led to believe that he is behaving as a specified man would under certain specified circumstances; but as a

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matter of fact he never is doing so, for he has to convey things to an audience that it would never do to let out to his fellow actors! Of course the fact that the audience is generally in the know with regard to the situation on the stage helps him to his effect, but that is not sufficient. Again, all the characters in a good play appear endowed with the dramatic sense to a far greater extent than is the case with the average mortal. That, in itself, is unnatural; but it has to be so, and can be so without destroying the illusion, just as all the characters in a play may talk blank verse, or be poets, without dispelling the illusion. It is therefore obvious that the actor must have, or acquire, the dramatic sense if he is to give the proper point to what he is saying.

The best definition of this sense is, perhaps, the desire to express yourself through the medium of acting. Whether the sense is acquirable or not, it is difficult to say. If you want to act, you want to act; if you don't, you don't! At the same time, there are hundreds of actors who think they want

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to, but are really after something quite different.

In the vast majority of cases where the dramatic sense is present it is only so in a very embryonic form. To develop this is the actor's business. Perhaps the best way to do this is by watching and by genuine criticism. By genuine criticism I do not mean merely the ability to detect faults, a thing that is not nearly so valuable as the power of discovering virtues. Ten minutes of the critic who can reveal the hidden treasures of a picture is worth a thousand years of the iconoclast. Of course one must be able to reject the spurious and to know it when one sees it, and the best way to do that is to make a careful study of the real. The diamond merchant's knowledge of the genuine article enables him to detect the paste. The present writer once met a wily old Arab who had made this discovery. He sold Egyptian antiques, and before entering his store he invited your inspection of a wonderful collection of forgeries, after seeing which, he explained, you would be forearmed. Then you were conducted into the presence of the genuine

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article, where you purchased liberally without fear, and were 'done' more than ever!!

The genuine article is, of course, not always easy to come by, but it is not such a rarity as many suppose. You may often find it by looking at things from the other fellow's point of view. Try and find out what he is driving at and whether he gets there, rather than what he in your opinion ought to be driving at, and whether he does not get there. This latter kind of criticism is very rife amongst the younger generation of actors, who do not always realise that their elders are where they are because they are what is wanted, just as the younger in their turn will one day be wanted. Neither generation will lose anything by looking at things from the other's point of view. A careful study of one effect and the manner in which an expert produces it will teach one how to produce other effects in other ways, just as a study of drawing from the human figure will teach one to paint animals or landscapes; and the higher up the scale one goes for the model, the more universal the lesson.

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The long and short of it is that proficiency in the art of acting, as in all other arts, requires something more than mere technical skill or personal charm, more even than talent. It requires broad sympathies, a wide outlook that will embrace the whole wood and at the same time not omit a single tree. Whatever may be said or thought to the contrary, an actor will very soon find that he cannot divorce his life from his work. As already said, if he wishes to be a big actor, he must be a big man. Time and parts will prove his capacity. Nor does it always follow that because he plays a small part well he will be equally successful with a bigger one. If he is a real artist, what he does he will do so well that everyone will think he can do lots more ; but he will very soon find he cannot unless he keeps on stoking.

And, above all, get out of the habit of reckoning the size and importance of a part from the number of lines spoken. As well might you reckon the stature of a man in feet and inches. If that were so, the greatest plays and parts that have ever

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been written are known only to their writers and one or two long-suffering managers' readers.

Young actors will be well advised, too, to take every opportunity they can get of working and playing parts other than those which they may be playing regularly every night. Much is written and said about the damaging effect on the actor's art of long runs, but that need not necessarily be so (especially with beginners, who will naturally be playing small parts) if they take every opportunity they can get of appearing at special matinées, private entertainments, and so on. There are several societies in the habit of giving such, notably the Stage Society and the Play Actors, active membership of which is warmly to be recommended. I have sometimes heard discussions in theatre dressing-rooms as to the wisdom of appearing too frequently at these sorts of performances. Some managers, it is averred, do not care to have the members of their company, whose exclusive services they are paying for, constantly appearing at other places. In some cases, that of a star who has a great personal following, one can understand

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that this may be so; but surely in the case of a minor member of his company the manager would be a churl who would put any obstacle in the way of his learning his art. Of course they expect their permission to be asked, and one seldom hears of a case where it is withheld. As a matter of fact, there is far too much talk amongst many young actors on the subject of this sort of worldly wisdom, many of whom seem to depend a great deal more upon their wits than their art to earn them a living.

Time, if nothing else, will show the vital importance of learning the trade thoroughly. Personal charm, magnetism, and consequently their following, cease with advancing years; but genuine artistic ability never fails to attract. It is probably this that gives rise to the oft-repeated phrase that there are no actors like the old ones; but the fact is that time is an important factor in forming the richness and mellowness of the old actor. He is like a garden lawn in this respect! Irene Vanbrugh, Hilda Trevelyan, Gerald Du Maurier, Dennis Eadie, are the Lady

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Bancrofts, Mrs Kendals, Rose Leclerqs, William Farrens, Henry Kembles, and John Hares of the future.

There are other actors one might mention whose vogue, great at one time, has depended upon such evanescent things as personality, magnetism, mesmerism, bluff, advertisement, and all the rest of the tribe of counterfeits, but is now on the wane. These methods, too, are all risky; you can never tell for certain whether they will "come off" or not. Even when they do seem to do so, the success and consequent satisfaction are only bad imitations of the genuine articles.

There is only one sure road to success, and that is, learn how to act!

The theory that an extremely sensitive nature is a necessary part of the actor's equipment as well as the other one that he must feel every part he portrays are both admirably summed up in the following "imaginary conversation" written by Sir Joshua Reynolds, the great President of the Royal Academy. The dialogue is supposed to take place between Goldsmith and Dr Johnson. Goldsmith has been attacking

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David Garrick, and Johnson is defending his pupil.

JOHNSON. (*Speaking of Garrick*) . . . His friends . . . well knew his sensibility to reproach and took care that he should be amply supplied with such bitter potions as they were capable of administering. Their impotent efforts he ought to have despised, but he felt them; nor did he affect insensibility.

GOLDSMITH. But you will allow, however, that this sensibility, those fine feelings, made him the great actor he was?

JOHNSON. This is all cant, fit only for kitchenwenches and chambermaids. Garrick's trade was to represent passion, not to feel it. Ask Reynolds whether he felt the distress of Count Ugolino when he drew it.

GOLDSMITH. But surely he feels the passion at the moment he is representing it?

JOHNSON. About as much as Punch feels. That Garrick gave himself in to this foppery of feelings I can easily believe; but he knew at the same time that he lied. He might think it right, as far as I know, to have what fools imagined he ought to have, but it is

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amazing that anyone should be so ignorant as to think that an actor would risk his reputation by depending on the feelings that shall be excited in the presence of two hundred people on the repetition of certain words which he has repeated two hundred times before in what he calls his study. No, sir, Garrick left nothing to chance. Every gesture, every expression of countenance and variation of voice was settled in his closet before he set foot upon the stage.

Supposing, for the sake of argument, that these actors and actresses who talk loudest about feeling their parts really do so. Close observation will reveal the fact that they seldom make the audience feel them ; therefore, as it is the actor's business to get over the footlights, this is evidently the wrong method. More than one good actor who is fond of asserting wonderful things in public has confided to me in private that they are all tommy-rot, done for effect. Actors are naturally showmen, with all the showmen's talent for, and skill in, embroidery, and they

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must realise that fact themselves and not think their embroidery too real and get entangled in it, like a sculptor who falls in love with his own masterpiece and dies from vain longing!

CHAPTER V

A COMMERCIAL CHAPTER

WE now come to what many may call sordid considerations, although, of course, they need not necessarily be so. Genuine commercialism is the art of assessing anything at its true market value, and should go hand in hand with art. No artist is to be trusted who professes to ignore or despise monetary considerations. He is either no artist or else a humbug and a charlatan—things that are by no means uncommon amongst artists! Sordidness, on the other hand, is surely getting as much as you can for as little as you can, purposely exaggerating what you have to give, and belittling what you want to get: in other words, falsifying values to your own advantage.

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Study the lives of great artists, and it will be surprising to find how many have had the reputation for being hard-headed men of business. That is because they had a correct notion of the value of their work. There have, of course, been instances where the world has, to all appearances, allowed a great man to starve; but investigation generally reveals the fact that the great man has allowed himself to starve by doing what he wanted to do all the time, instead of what he ought to part of the time. The Psalmist who said he never saw the righteous man begging his bread referred to artists quite as much as to anyone else.

The first thing, therefore, that the young actor has to do is to try and arrive at the proper value of his work. This is, of course, governed by many considerations: the state of the money market at the time, the relation of supply to demand, and so on. The actor is on the look-out for a certain sort of part at a certain sort of theatre. He must reason with himself and find out what such a part and a suitable person to play it costs to produce.

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For the sake of argument we will say that it is a small juvenile part at a West End theatre. A young gentleman is wanted who must dress well "on and off," for the theatre is a smart one and willing to pay for its reputation as such. For a young man to wash, dress, and shave himself well costs so much, to live in a locality and style where he can do those things costs so much, and the money that has to be spent in educating up to the necessary standard to play that part at all amounts to so much. He is also a straight-limbed young man. Are straight limbs common, or are they not? Consider all these questions fairly with yourself, and you will not have much difficulty in arriving at your true value. But you should not, and must not, drag in extraneous considerations. You would like an extra pound a week because you have got a wife or an aged grandmother to support. But why should the manager support your wife or your aged grandmother? Of course, if he wants you especially for the part, that is different. He must expect to have to pay for you and your appendages. But those are individual considerations in addition to

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general, and they do not come into play as a rule until you have been some time upon the stage and begun to make a name for yourself ; then, of course, managers will have to pay for your appendages as well as yourself, if they want you.

It must always be remembered that the financial output is invariably regulated by the income, and when you get to the above enviable position of being able to command terms, it means to say that you may be depended upon to draw so much into the theatre. It may seem very unfair that Harry Lauder should receive a couple of hundred pounds a week for singing a pretty, trivial song or two nightly, when So-and-so only receives five pounds a week for playing Hamlet. The thing is really perfectly just. Each is paid on his drawing capacity. Money begets money, and it is only fair and reasonable that it should. A good Hamlet is a difficult thing to get, attracts large audiences, and will always command large sums of money ; but, of course, most people will vastly prefer seeing a lesser work of art well represented to a greater one badly represented.

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Money is only a means of exchange, and its value is proportionate to the amount of it there is in the market. Take, for instance, a great picture. In one sense it is priceless. There is only one of it in existence; therefore it will fetch as much money as there is to spare to buy pictures with. If several people with millions to spare are all after it, it may fetch a million or more. If, on the other hand, there are only hundreds going, it will only fetch hundreds; but the value of the picture has not altered. Much is talked and written of the fluctuating value of great works of art, but a close inspection reveals the fact that few things maintain their value more steadily. It is the market that varies. So is it with your acting and its salary. There is an institution in theatre-land known as "summer terms." By many it is thought a most iniquitous institution; but if it really is a fact that the theatre is not such a draw in the summer, and the same work does not command the same returns, then it is quite fair that the salaries should be lowered. But—and this is the point—is that really so? It has come to be a sort of accepted condition

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that it is ; but there are a good many of these "accepted conditions" in theatre-land which will not bear looking into.

It is also a recognised custom in most theatres that actors should give one *matinée* per week for nothing, and only be paid an extra half-day's salary for the other. Perhaps there was a time when this was justifiable, when *matinées* were not so fashionable as they are now and a large audience could not be expected. But that is surely not the case now, and the manager's expenses are not so great at morning performances; he has no rent to pay.

However, this chapter is not a trades-union propaganda nor a treatise on theatrical economical conditions, but merely an attempt to arrive at the best means of gauging one's true value.

The size of a part only governs the size of the salary that will be paid for it to a limited extent; probably to about the same as in pictures. A large Rembrandt will fetch more than a small one; but a small Rembrandt will fetch a great deal more than the largest picture Maclise or Doré ever painted. When discuss-

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ing terms with managers you will generally find that you get what you want if you are really reasonable. At the same time, exact reason from others. Business managers will often do their best to make it appear that they are doing you a favour in engaging you, in which case you will lose nothing by saying you do not wish to be under an obligation to anybody and going your way. Of course a lot of nonsense will be talked to the young actor about the standing of the theatre he hopes to enter, the great honour it confers in allowing him to enter its sacred portals, an honour that is in itself worth so much per week, and so forth and so on; but he will know precisely how much value to attach to these undignified claims. Business is business should be the actor's motto as well as the business manager's. It is the latter gentleman, by the way, who is generally the first to forget it.

As he gets on in his profession the actor, naturally enough, perhaps, will be as prone to overrate his own drawing power as the manager will be to underrate it. Probably the truth will be found somewhere about half-way between the two! The actor

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—and he is rare—who is inclined to under-rate gains more in the long-run than he who goes to the other extreme; but there is no real reason at all why both should not be reasonable, and much time and money is saved thereby.

Advertising is another important department. In this connection surely actors often make a very serious mistake in continually advertising, or attempting to advertise, themselves before the public, when it is really to the manager that they should bring their wares. True, they seldom advertise their *wares* to the public. The great object seems to be to keep *themselves* and their *names* continually to the fore. But what is the use of advertising the fact that you can play golf, or cricket, or trim hats at a garden party, or some such tomfoolery, when your business is to act? As well might a bootmaker advertise that he can paint pictures!

Of course there are a very large number of folk on the stage whose business is not so much to show that they can act as to hide the fact that they cannot; and these are the people who are never happy unless they

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are being conspicuous in some way or another. Well, they know their own business best, and, like Theudas, manage to get a lot of folk to believe they are somebody just because they say they are. But these folk are not really actors with the dignity of a great profession at heart, but showmen and mountebanks looking after number one.

The finest advertisement with managers and public is a good piece of acting, and what the public say about you to their friends when they go home after the play is the thing that really counts. Off the stage actors are, of course, notoriously "shoppy," but that is not entirely their own fault. The theatre exercises such a peculiar fascination over people, that an actor's lay friends will seldom give him the chance of talking anything else. At the same time, a witty piece of advice that was once given by Sir Squire Bancroft will not come amiss. "Shakespeare," said Sir Squire, "said that all the world's a stage, but he never said the stage was all the world!"

Everybody who is on the stage knows that as a profession it is in sad need of reforma-

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tion, and attempts have been made from time to time to form various unions, protective societies, etc., on the lines of trade unions, a comparison which the average actor detests. For some reason or other he hates to hear the profession he so dearly loves dubbed as a trade. At least, that is what he says. The truth of the matter is, probably, that the individual whom he loves more dearly still becomes a tradesman ; probably one of the very things he has gone on the stage to avoid !

But is not every art by which we earn our living in a sense a trade, and, for the matter of that, every trade an art too ?

Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost, seems to apply to the stage more than to, perhaps, any other profession. Well, as long as every man is for himself, be sure that the devil will take the hindmost, and the foremost too. For centuries actors have been treated as rogues and vagabonds ; and if you treat a man as a certain thing for long enough, that thing he will become, and actors can scarcely expect to get out of their roguery and vagabondage all at once. It is not in

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human nature. There is no better definition of a vagabond than a person who is always looking after number one, or of a rogue than a person who pretends he isn't; and both these complaints are fairly rife upon the stage. What is wanted is not a general reformation so much as an individual one, and all that is wanted at present in the shape of a union is surely to hand in the Actors' Association. That institution is very much abused, and undoubtedly merits some of the abuse levelled at it. What human institution doesn't? That because an institution is not perfect it should not be supported is an argument fit for those who scoff at the Hague Tribunal because it has not yet brought about the world's peace, or who in the old days imprisoned debtors and thus effectually prevented their ever being able to get out of debt. The Actors' Association has undoubtedly effected some reforms, and was, I believe, instrumental in procuring the first move towards payment for rehearsals, a very necessary reform. More information upon the practical workings of the Association and the good that it has so far done will be

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found in the chapter on it written by Mr Clarence Derwent, who has long been actively connected with its working. Suffice it to say that if actors are unwilling to support their old association, it is not very likely that they will be able to support any new one, and the great objection that the subscription, fifteen shillings per annum, is too high, seems ridiculous. There is probably not an actor in the kingdom who does not spend at least three times that amount on not only what he does not really want, but what he has no business to have. My own impression is that the subscription is very much too low. If it were raised you would undoubtedly get fewer members and probably lose some of the existing ones, but the remainder and any others who might join would show by the sacrifice they were willing to make that they were in earnest, and probably much more useful work would be done.

The long and short of it is that if the actor wishes to see his profession raised to a higher level, he must be prepared to pay the price.

Look at it which way you will, it is not a well-paid or lucrative profession. Salaries

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sometimes sound tall, but, as hinted elsewhere, that is because they are paid by the week. Taking one year with another, very few actors can point to an annual income which compares favourably with the plums of any other profession. As for retiring with a fortune, one or two managers, and perhaps an occasional music-hall singer, have been able to do it, but the most an actor can look forward to, as a rule, is a very modest income and a very modest villa in the suburbs: scarcely an alluring prospect at the end of a long and painful journey. But to those who really love the road, the journey is worth undertaking for its own sake.

The question of elasticity of salary is a somewhat vexed one amongst actors, some holding that it is unwise ever to abate one shilling of one's demands, and that such a proceeding tends to depreciate one's market value. But surely that is a fallacy, and, if anything, a certain amount of elasticity increases the demand for one's services. The actor who is prepared to give and take a little finds his reward in a greater number of engagements and an annual income which

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will compare very favourably with that of an actor who may have missed several weeks' work by sticking out for his previous highest salary, which may have been a special one for a special occasion.

Fortunately, the idea that it is *infra dig.* for the actor to appear at a music hall is now a thing of the past, and sketches have now a recognised place on every music-hall programme. There is surely nothing undignified in the actor's appearing anywhere if he gives the audience of his best. Trading on one's name and reputation and giving the audience an inferior article is the undignified proceeding. Every actor should be devoutly thankful for the coming of the "sketch," which has so materially widened his market. At the same time, he should respect the arrangement that has been come to between the theatre and the music-hall proprietors, and will have only himself to blame if, accepting an engagement in a sketch that exceeds the prescribed limits, he finds himself suddenly thrown out of work through an injunction.

In conclusion, the actor who develops his

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commercial instincts on sound, common-sense lines will find that his art will not suffer in the least thereby ; rather will it improve, for he will find a great advance in his ability to assess values in all directions. For an artist to ignore, or profess to ignore, the business side of his art means a blind spot somewhere. A great artist takes *everything* into account.

CHAPTER VI

ON TOUR—A PLEASANT INTERLUDE

TOURING forms a very pleasant part of the London actor's life, at any rate. Whether the same can be said for the provincial actor, who spends his life on the road, the present writer is not in a position to say. But it is certain that the London actor who never goes on tour stands as poor a chance of perfecting himself in his art as the provincial actor who has never played to a London audience. For learning how to handle an audience, or rather, how to handle the same part before different audiences, and under varying mechanical conditions, there is nothing like the provinces. An actor on tour is like a golfer making a tour of the different links in the countryside. He may be a plus player on his own course, but he will prob-

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ably find himself badly beaten by scratch or handicap players on others; and this the more especially if his own course be the best. And London will certainly bear this comparison, for a London audience is most certainly the finest and most discriminating in the country, if not in the world. The present writer had a curious opportunity of testing this once, in a small way. He was playing a very minute part, in which, however, there was one subtly humorous line. In one city he could say the line fairly naturally; in another he had to point out the joke to the audience as he said it; and in another he had fairly to "pong" it at them, and this on every night in the week, too! So it was not the individuals but the audiences who varied in their "glegness at the uptak." In London the line could be said perfectly naturally and unconsciously and the audience safely left to see the humour for themselves. Then, again, the varying mechanical conditions on tour are excellent practice for the voice. In London it does not often happen that one actor plays the same part in more than one theatre, but on tour the theatre

varies with every week, and sometimes more often; and the actor, if he knows his business, should never take more than a few minutes to accommodate himself to the new conditions. Like the golfer, he should acquaint himself first with the lie of the ground, and always have a look at the house he is to play in before the curtain goes up.

Then he can sometimes take a look at his audience before ever they assemble in a theatre. That is not so difficult as it seems. Different people will say that different parts of the theatre are its backbone, but it seems to me that it is not in that direction that we must look for that part of the audience which, if any, counts the most. In the age of your patrons lies the secret of whom to please. And the most enthusiastic theatre-going age is, I think, from twenty to thirty-five, or thereabouts. These are the people that rave about the theatre and the actors and actresses, and get up parties to go there, often two or three times a week. These folk are to be found as a rule at the following places. The class that patronise the pit and gallery

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are generally to be seen parading the principal street, usually the theatre street, of the town at about six o'clock of a Sunday evening, soon after the actor arrives in town. The stalls, dress circle, and box class will be emptying themselves from Sunday afternoon concerts, cathedral services, and local trains from the residences of their country friends. By watching these an observant actor will soon see how the land lies. The nature of a town, too, may form a valuable indication of the kind of plays they like ; but this may be more in the manager's department. In towns where there is a university there will always be a certain following for classical drama and for the more serious forms of modern drama. The great cities, almost solely given over to manufacture, are not unnaturally prone to run to the lighter and more amusing forms.

Wild horses would not drag from me the name of the city in the provinces which supplies the best audiences. Suffice it to say that it is not the one which thinks it does ! Some of them seem to have certain characteristics which it may not be unamusing to point out. Manchester has a very delicate artistic

conscience, is inclined to be sensitive, and is not altogether unlike the sect of whom it is said that they have a high wall built round them in heaven lest they should find out that there is anyone else there besides themselves. But do not imagine that Manchester can be hoodwinked on this account, for she cannot and will never accept the second-rate article. The same may be said of Liverpool, which is not going to be beaten by Manchester. Edinburgh and Glasgow both supply admirable audiences, as keen as they can be, with Edinburgh slightly the more humorous and easy-going. Dublin prides itself on its sense of humour, so look out for unexpected laughs. Birmingham, too, is a fine audience that knows what it wants and sees that it gets it.

Many of these large provincial centres now have their own repertory theatres, where the very best plays are repeatedly performed by first-class companies. The idea that "anything is good enough for the provinces," which seemed to exist in some managers' minds at one time, no longer holds good, if it ever did.

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To the young actor going on tour for the first time the question of lodgings is naturally a very important one, and he will be well advised not to leave these till the last moment, but to get them all fixed up beforehand. It is a great nuisance, on arriving at a town, to have to set out and hunt for "digs." It is as well to take rooms on personal recommendation only, else you may find yourself landed in some queer places. The A. A. issues a very useful little handbook with a list of recommended rooms, but it is as well to get a personal recommendation in addition.

Theatrical lodgings are not expensive. If two or three club together, they should not have to pay much more than eighteen shillings to a pound a week each for everything.

With respect to luggage, it is sometimes as well to keep your theatre and private baggage separate. But when not travelling very heavy costume plays, a theatre basket will always be found very useful for carrying some of the private stuff and thus lightening the baggage to be taken to the "digs." The

company's baggage man who looks after the theatre luggage will generally do the same for the private luggage too, for a consideration, but you will find it cheaper and safer to look after that yourself.

When leaving "digs," do not forget to write your name, and something apposite, in the landlady's book! "A home from home," "Pudding like mother makes it," and so on! If you do not know the landlady's name, she will expect to be called "Ma" or "Mrs Mactaggart"!

In most towns the theatrical lodgings are situated quite near the theatres, but it is not always so, and the actor is wise who makes himself thoroughly acquainted with the time and distance between himself and his theatre. Also go down on Monday afternoon and take your place in the dressing-room and see that everything is ready for the evening's show. The first night at a new town on tour is often apt to be a little confused, and it is well to be forearmed. Do not forget that in Edinburgh it is the custom on Saturday nights to ring up a quarter of an hour earlier than on other days in the week. Most

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actors forget this at some time or other in their career.

Actors who are golfers are most strongly advised to take their clubs with them. The secretaries of almost every club in the kingdom will be only too delighted to put them up for the day if they bring their credentials, and they will have a grand opportunity of sampling all the finest links in the kingdom.

Altogether, there are few pleasanter experiences in the life of the average actor than a good tour. Travelling is done under very pleasant conditions: one's carriage is reserved without any trouble on one's own part, one's fare paid, and one invariably travels on Sundays, when it is very pleasant to speed along through the quiet countryside.

Do not forget to look at the train-call on the notice-board on Saturday nights; mark well the particular station you start from, and note the time of the call, not the time the train starts; then you will never run things too fine!

It is sometimes wise, by the way, to get the advance agent of the company you are

travelling with to bespeak a cab to meet you at the station. They are not always to be had on late Sunday afternoons, especially up north. If you are travelling with a first-class London company, do not adopt any superior airs with any provincial crowds you may meet *en route*, and walk up and down the platform as if you own it. They are better informed of the "ropes" of touring than you are, and may often have it in their power to make things pleasant or unpleasant for you by recommending lodgings, etc.

Find out the principal newspapers of the different towns you go to, *and pay great attention to the criticisms*. Do not be forever comparing them unfavourably with the London ones. Remember you are acting in the provinces, and it is your business to try and give them what you have to give in a way they will understand. By studying the notices you will see if you have succeeded in this, and very likely if not, why not.

If you feel out of sorts on a Monday, do not make up your mind that it is the place that disagrees with you, that you will never be well all through the week, and so on. If

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you do, your acting will suffer as well as yourself and your audience. Also, it is very much more probable that you disagree with the place!

Finally, return to town having thoroughly enjoyed your tour. You may be sure then that your audiences, your fellow-actors, and your managers have enjoyed it too.

CHAPTER VII

ON MAKE-UP AND DRESS AND APPEARANCES GENERALLY

UPON these subjects the author, conscious of not being an adept at any of them, writes with a certain amount of diffidence, and only of such considerations as are perceptible to anyone of average common sense accustomed to study the theatre from behind as well as before the curtain. Also, his remarks upon the art and technique of making-up are on the whole only a few broad and elementary generalities for the absolute beginner.

Perhaps the first thing that strikes one in both these departments is a somewhat strong tendency to overdo things. The number of plays, especially modern plays, that are over-

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dressed are only equalled by the number of characters in them that are over made-up.

When making-up for a part many things have to be considered : the size of the theatre, the strength of the lights, and so on ; and no really painstaking actor will come dressed on the stage without having taken the trouble to ascertain these things, especially on tour, where the conditions vary from week to week. Indeed, as elsewhere hinted, when writing, producing, or acting a play, the artist's first duty is to acquaint himself thoroughly with the "mechanical" conditions. Just as, when playing a part, it is a good thing to employ your own personality so far as it is compatible with the character, so is it to be able if possible to use your own features and even sometimes your own complexion ! If you are to play a part with a blue chin, and have the misfortune to have one—and many actors have—do not cover it all over with that abomination called a foundation, but just accentuate the colour with the aid of as much and not more grease paint as is necessary. If some sort of a foundation is necessary, put on as thinly as

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possible the surface colour required. Spreading a uniform colour all over the face as a ground to work on, though very popular with many actors, often gives the skin an impression of leatheriness and robs it of the semi-transparent, glowing look it should have. Some of our prettiest actresses make themselves look very "dolly"-looking, and so do some of our actors, by the way they plaster their faces with "Nos. 2-3½." Of course everyone looks his or her best on the stage, and has the most becoming dark eyebrows and eyelashes. When one comes to think of this, it seems rather absurd, but it probably does not matter more than the fact that the characters in a play all have a most wonderfully developed dramatic sense, and are all poets if the play is by Shakespeare. One is reminded, too, of Sir Herbert Tree's rejoinder to a diminutive actor who complained, when not allowed to appear in *Julius Cæsar* on account of his size, that some Romans were quite small men. "Yes," said Sir Herbert, "but we do not show them on the stage."

Take care to avoid "dodges." Someone

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once told an actress that it was a good thing to paint at least half the outside of the upper eyelid with blue. What sort of effect it is supposed to produce I have never been able to fathom. To me it has always looked perfectly ridiculous from the front, and many times have I been asked by theatre-goers why actresses paint their eyelids blue. A white line down the front of the nose is supposed to have a straightening effect; but it has not really. What it does is to give the nose an aquiline effect if it happens to be already straight but rather flat; but if it happens to be crooked, a straight white line only accentuates that fact, unless drawn so that it follows the line the nose really should take. Then it must be remembered that the full face will not be presented to the audience the whole time, so the line must be shaded off to the sides and counteracting shadows must be put in, otherwise the profile will look ridiculous. This one illustration is sufficient to illustrate my point, which is that make-up cannot be made an absolute rule of thumb, the matter of a prescription or a receipt, and the various "tips" must all

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be used in conjunction with common sense. Be careful of the man who will tell you everything in numbers. He will ask you how old the part you are supposed to be playing is, and then recommend number so-and-so; but it is not always the age that governs the complexion, as we know. A character must be studied carefully in all its bearings, and its age, health, habits, and moral character considered before it is possible to arrive at a final decision as to its outward appearance. Then, when that is done, no natural complexion, unless it be that of a coal-black nigger, can be attained by means of a single tint. It is more than probable that it will require a good many more than one colour to get what is required. A good artist uses his make-up box as he would a paint-box, and to hear one particular number described as being the right one for such and such a complexion often sounds as ridiculous as to hear an art teacher advise a student to use pink for the cheeks, or green for the trees.

Be very careful of the skin behind the ears. Observation will reveal the fact that

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the most strongly marked or highest colour in anyone's complexion is nearly always well accentuated behind the ears, and to forget this and leave that part unmade-up invariably produces the appearance of a mask. Nothing looks worse, and few mistakes are more common than this one, unless it be a bad wig-join.

There is no need to enlarge upon this latter point. Common sense will tell the actor that he must obliterate the line of demarcation between his forehead and his wig-join, and also that his forehead gets lighter in tone as it gets higher up. Another thing that many actors do not seem to realise is that no human being ever had a moustache or beard darker in tone than his hair. This does not, of course, apply to white or grey hair, a black moustache with such being quite common. But yellow hair was never seen with a dark brown moustache, or red hair with a black. Also, there are certain shades of sandy and brown hair which *never* have dark eyes and eyelashes, and never harmonise with them, and therefore never look natural with them. These are the sort of things which those with sufficient

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observation to make them good artists will see for themselves, and it seems hopeless to try and point them out to those who cannot naturally do so.

With regard to the actual materials to be used, the best grease paints are undoubtedly made in Germany, and Leichner's still hold the field, and, as we are a free trade country, are as cheap as any other. In this respect, at any rate, actors will lose heavily by tariff reform! Beards, moustaches, wigs, etc., can generally be made exactly to design at any of the recognised perruquiers, but this only if you *insist* on getting what you want, and refuse to be put off with anything else. Speaking of beards and moustaches, astonishingly admirable and life-like effects can be produced with crêpe hair helped out by a little grease paint. Spirit gum is the recognised medium for sticking hair on to the face with, but white hard varnish is quite as effective, less unpleasant, and less expensive.

Make-up may be removed with practically any sort of grease or oil, but not soap and water! There are numbers of excellent preparations on the market, most of which can

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be manufactured at home for about a fifth of their cost. Lard seems to be the principal ingredient; therefore keep your grease tin guarded from the mice that invariably infest theatres, also your powder-puff, which, for some reason or another, seems a favourite delicacy with them. Always powder your face after you have made up, and never before. The former prevents its looking greasy, and the latter prevents it taking the paint. Remember that the highest light is nearly always next to the darkest; therefore, when you are putting in lines, remember to make your high lights near them. Never make lines, by the way, with black paint unless you are playing some very dirty old person: there is not such a thing as a plain black line, or a white one either, for the matter of that, in the human face, as you will soon see for yourself if you study some good portraits. A course of study of this sort, by the way, is very much to be recommended to actors, for painting portraits and "making-up" have naturally a good deal in common, and nearly every actor who is a good hand at making-up will generally have some pro-

ficiency in drawing. Indeed, that there are an astonishing number of good draughtsmen amongst actors was proved by the walls of Mr Cyril Maude's dressing-room at the Haymarket Theatre. Facilities for the study of good portraits are so plentiful in nearly every city of importance in the kingdom that there is practically no excuse for the actor who takes no trouble in this respect.

An idea sometimes seems to prevail outside the theatre that actors have their faces made up for them by their dressers; but it is scarcely necessary to point out that that is not the case. To be able to make-up is part of the actor's stock-in-trade, and all professionals must be fairly proficient at it; but, of course, some are more so than others. There are some who make-up too well for their acting powers. They look the part to perfection, but cannot play it. Others act so wonderfully that their appearance does not seem to matter much. Examine the portraits of Garrick or Kean as Macbeth, or Salvini as Othello. Dress, make-up, in fact their whole appearance, is perfectly ridiculous, but their performances were not so, from all accounts.

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Undoubtedly it is better to act rightly and dress wrongly than the other way about; but best of all is to do both rightly; and this is all the more necessary to the actor of moderate ability, for whom this book is mainly written.

Dress is a very important subject, on or off the stage; in fact, "dress well on and off" is a *sine quâ non* in many engagements. Certainly, when hunting for work, the actor should be at pains to look his best, especially if the manager he wishes to see is a man of fastidious tastes. To such nothing is more annoying or calculated to spoil one's chances than any carelessness or even *démodiness* in one's personal appearance. Many managers would far sooner have an inefficient actor or doubtful character in their company than a man who appeared off the stage in a frock or morning coat with brown boots!

It is as well, too, to present an appearance of prosperity and self-respect. A prosperous man is generally a capable man. Managers are not often taken in by appearances, but they are sometimes impressed by them. It is not, however, wise to carry things too far,

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like the actor who, clad in a heavy fur coat, set out to interview a manager in August. Said a friend who met him, "What have you got that thing on for? Going to play 'heavies'?" "No," said the actor; "but none of your d——d summer terms for me!" "The apparel oft proclaims the man" is another truism the actor can borrow from *Hamlet*. But it is no use to just look dressed up for the occasion. To be really impressive, one must look as though one were in the habit of looking one's best, and the best way to do that is to get into the habit of it.

Never attempt to appeal to a manager's sense of pity. To do so is both unfair and unbusiness-like. Pity, like sympathy, is one of those things that is seldom, if ever, consciously aroused.

Dress on the stage is a subject to which, in England at any rate, the proper amount of attention seems very seldom to be paid. There is generally either too much or too little. Plays seem nearly always over-dressed, under-dressed, or wrongly dressed. When too little attention is paid, the actor

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is left too much to himself in this matter. He gets a part to study, sees the "dressy" possibilities of it at once from a mere study of the lines and cues, whereas the character and situation and everything else will have a bearing upon it. Naturally an actor or an actress always likes to look his or her best as far as possible, but at the same time it does not do to come down to breakfast looking too spick and span after a very trying night. When too much attention is paid to dress, the fact becomes obvious and tiresome. Everybody likes dressing up, and this has a lot to do with the popularity of the stage. Indeed, more than one actor has confided to me that he would sooner play a small part that was "dressy" than a big one that was shabbily dressed; and the actress whose sole object in going on the stage is to show herself off in handsome costumes is by no means uncommon. Plays that attract at all nowadays have such long runs that it is practically necessary to start them on their career with a new outfit; but it often looks ridiculous to see every character who is not an absolute tramp looking like a tailor's

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model or a mannequin. This is one good reason why the best time to see a play is when it has been running for a few weeks. Actors will be well advised, if they wish to accustom themselves to their costumes and their costumes to themselves, to wear them occasionally before the first performance. In this respect the growing tendency of many managers to have two or more dress rehearsals is a very welcome innovation.

The whole question of appearance, in all its branches, is really a very important and far-reaching one in the art of the theatre. The questions of how far an actor may invest a character with his own personality, of how far producers when casting plays should consider the personality of their actors, or which is the most potent factor, the appearance of the part or the playing of it, all come up for serious consideration. My own impression with regard to the first of these questions is that it is a good thing for an actor to invest a part with his own personality as far as is compatible ; at the same time, to avoid exploiting that personality and foisting it upon the public gaze on every possible

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and impossible opportunity by means of picture postcards, personal paragraphs, and all the paraphernalia of the showman. An actor who insists too much upon his own personality generally has a limited following drawn from one particular age, class, or sex—a very bad sign; but an actor who, even if he does not always completely disguise it, fits his own personality to a wide variety of parts, has a large following of all classes and sexes, which is a very good sign.

The second question is really one more for producers than actors, and need not be discussed here; but the third is very important. One would have thought it sufficiently obvious that to play a part well is more important than merely to look it; but it is not so to many managers and producers. The habit of casting parts upon mere outward appearance is probably more prevalent in England than anywhere else, and there are very few managers who will not sooner have juvenile or *ingénue* parts played by good-looking young men or pretty girls who cannot act, rather than by plainer ones who can. The result is that many

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excellent plays do not go off so well as they should. Nothing palls or bores more quickly than mere prettiness. That which comes from the physical senses goes to the physical senses ; that which comes from the mind goes to the mind ; and that which comes from the heart goes to the heart ; and it is to the hearts of audiences that plays must appeal if they are really to interest and consequently succeed. No girl ever yet really won a man's heart by her pretty face, though she may think she did ; nor did any man captivate what was worth captivating in a girl with his handsome face and figure. "She loved me for the dangers I had passed," said Othello, and had he realised that he was speaking the truth, he would never have feared the rivalry of Cassio, and the tragedy would not have happened. Go to Germany or Norway, or, in fact, almost anywhere but England (or possibly France, where all the women see to it that they are attractive), and you will see real, genuine, moving love-dramas played by plain maidens and ungainly young men, who will wring your heart by the sincerity and genuineness of

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their acting. I can call to mind more than one English actor whose appearance has always prevented his being cast for juveniles, and who, having attained by other avenues the enviable position where he is his own master and may do what he likes, has drawn the whole town by his sympathetic playing of "juveniles." The pitch to which this state of things has arrived in this country is well evidenced by the fact that it is the custom for every actress and actor applying for work to send his or her photograph to the manager, and upon that photograph he or she is as often as not accepted or rejected. "Send me a photograph of your talent, my dear young lady, or my dear sir," should be the manager's request.

In acting, as in all the other arts, there is the genuine article and its counterfeit, and there have been and are now on the English stage some quite famous actors who have really only mastered the counterfeit. A careful study of methods will soon reveal which they are. By crying out that they are somebody, they make audiences believe that they are, and their performances are

the bluff of very accomplished showmen, in which mental suggestion and mesmerism play their parts; and the actor is helped by the fact, of which he is well aware, that his audience is as ignorant of the way people behave in certain situations as he is himself.

But the after-effects of these sort of shows give them away, even to those who are unable to see through them at the time. The elation, excitement, and interest produced are very transitory, and give place to a reaction which makes one wonder why one was so interested. But the genuine article is unforgettable, and most of us have seen now and again pieces of acting that time will never obliterate from our memory, and that have maintained their steady place at the summit of conviction in our minds. Such was Sir Henry Irving's Corporal Brewster. There were blemishes in it. Someone who knew about such things once pointed out to the present writer that Irving's method of breathing in the part was not really indicative of the "*toob*" trouble from which he was supposed to be suffering; but to the

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lay mind of course that did not much matter. There was a moment, however, in the play when he was supposed to be dying in his chair, which startled the whole theatre; he lay so still, so very, very still, that suddenly the whole audience caught its breath and looked scared. For a second they thought that not only the old soldier but the actor who played the part was dead. Such moments as this occurred fairly frequently in many of that great actor's impersonations; but the fact that there were times when he did not convince, or the conviction was not lasting, should show the actor that he must be ever on the alert and not always take the first thing that comes to hand. All acting, indeed, all art, is to a certain extent fake and compromise; but you must not fake your acting by taking advantage of the ignorance of your audience. There will be some present who are already in the know, and all will be some day. There are perhaps still some people left who despise all actors, "mimes," as they call them, "who spend their lives imitating other

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people." Shakespeare, however, said that "all the world's a stage and men and women only players!" It is surely better to act consciously than unconsciously; but when you are acting, act, do not just look as if you were doing it.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR AMATEURS

A CERTAIN literary critic once said, referring to a certain book, that it made professionals amateurs and amateurs professionals. No better compliment was ever paid to a book, and the author must have been intensely gratified. In speaking of actors, I would that all professionals were amateurs in the highest sense of the word, and all amateurs professionals in the pains they take over their work and see that it is properly finished off and complete. The true meaning of the word "amateur" is "lover." An amateur of acting should be a lover of acting; and it is a great pity that it has generally come to mean an indifferent performer, to whom his work is not of the first importance. Some better word in contradistinction to pro-

professional could surely have been coined. However, as it has not been done hitherto, I will not attempt to do it now, but make use of the old one for the present chapter, and treat it with the greatest respect.

Amateur acting is not by any means a thing to scoff at. On the contrary, as in photography, there are some things that amateurs generally do very much better than professionals. Of course this is not so much the case as in photography, where the amateur is superior in nearly every department, and especially that of art; but experience has shown me that there are one or two lessons which professionals may well learn from amateurs. To begin with, the latter almost invariably learn their parts better and more quickly. It is no uncommon thing to find every member of an amateur cast word-perfect at the first rehearsal,—a thing that is a great help to the producer; but it is somewhat rare to find every member of a professional cast dead-letter perfect at the last rehearsal! Then, again, amateurs are not, as a rule, so fussy, and if anything goes wrong are far

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more likely to keep their heads. An actor of my acquaintance once played in a piece where it was very important in one scene that he should bring a certain bag on to the stage. He forgot the bag. He was playing the scene with a young amateur actor of about nine years old. Observing what had happened, the boy was not one whit flustered, but neatly altered his part to suit the changed circumstances, and made it appear perfectly natural for the other man to go off the stage and come back with the bag. Had both been professionals, probably a very different tale would be being told in the Green Room Club to this day. Then, again, amateurs sometimes seem to succeed in getting a certain sort of very desirable *naturalness*, and, for want of a better word, artistry, into their work which professionals so often lack. Witness some of the village plays and players that are just now the vogue. Also, the Irish players, who are no longer amateurs, but professionals of the very highest pretensions, began operations with the same quality in their work, and still maintain it.

At the same time, amateurs need not plume

themselves too much upon this naturalness, for it is generally quite unconscious, and only brought out by very fine producers. The fact of the matter is, although its presence in the raw material undoubtedly indicates genuine talent, it has to go through a good many stages before it becomes part of the actor's stock-in-trade. An actor has not only to be able to do a thing, but to know why he does it and how he does it. In learning this lesson the original gift sometimes appears lost; but it is not, and with perseverance will come back again, this time as his servant to command when, where, and how he pleases.

Many professional actors, whilst they have passed the first stage of unconscious, have not yet reached that of conscious naturalness; hence a sort of hybrid "theatrical," "artificial" state. In this state a great many seem to remain.

In any case, amateurs, if they are to do any good at all, require a great deal of "producing"—a fact they do not often seem to recognise. The self-satisfaction of the professional actor is proverbially great, but it

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is nothing compared to that of the average amateur. He either thinks he knows all or else that there is nothing to know about it, and if he is told to stand in a certain place or say things in a certain way, sees no reason at all why he should not stand somewhere else and say them differently.

The present writer has more than once been asked to "look in" at some amateur rehearsals and pull things together a bit, and been received with cold resentment when offering any suggestions! In the innocence of his heart he thought that was what they really wanted, but, oh dear, no, it wasn't! They were after admiration and the most fulsome flattery. And they got it from their lay friends, who of course prefaced their remarks with, "Of course we don't know anything about it, but we've seen Wyndham play the part, and he did not seem to do it any better than you do!" Perhaps he didn't, but he probably did!

Amateurs must learn the lesson that every professional has to learn, namely, that of obedience. They must do what they are told by their producer, without always wanting to

know the reason why. To explain may often require more time than there is at hand. At the same time, if amateurs will admit to themselves that they know little or nothing whatever about the technical side of their art, while their producer, if he be a professional, probably knows all about it, they become more pliable, and perhaps even have a slight advantage over the young professional, with his dangerous provision of a little knowledge.

A great reputation as an amateur is not always a safe augury of an equally great one as a professional. It is not so difficult to shine as an amateur when the chances are "odds on" that if you have any talent at all, you will be the exception. Where all the rest are blind the one-eyed man is king! Also, it is one thing to play a part well and convincingly in the Theatre Royal back drawing-room or Corn Exchange, and another to play it in a regular theatre, where one is not on such intimate terms with one's audience and has to learn to speak and move about naturally under quite artificial conditions. An amateur with sufficient talent to ensure lifting himself

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out of the ruck of the professional stage would probably be as prominent amongst his fellows as Ranjitsinjhi at a village cricket match. Then, too, much information valuable to the amateur is useless to the professional, and many useful lessons picked up in amateur days have to be forgotten or laid aside on the professional stage. A very well-known actor in the very front rank of his profession, who enjoyed a great reputation as an amateur, says that when he first went on the regular stage he found he not only did nothing right, but did everything wrong. He could not even remain passive! So that if the amateur really desires to give good performances, let him do everything with the approval of his producer, and consult that gentleman or someone who really knows what he is talking about, before resting satisfied as to the merits of his performance. Beware the superlative praiser; he is generally as far out in his judgments as the superlative abuser.

Amateurs seem very prone to make mistakes in the choice of plays. They so frequently choose something that requires acting far beyond what they can put into the field to

make it go. *David Garrick, A Pair of Spectacles*, Robertson's comedies, and scores of rubbishy little one-acters not worth the printing or the playing seem their favourite game. Now, *Garrick* and *A Pair of Spectacles*, both admirable comedies in a certain sort of artificial way, are just the kind of plays above all others that require most experienced and admirable acting to make them appear convincing. This is still more true of the host of little plays, often selected, it is only fair to add, through excessive modesty on the amateur's part. The best plays for amateurs to act are, in my opinion, the best plays that are written of the *natural school*. The comedies of Granville Barker, Charles M'Evoy, St John Hankin, John Galsworthy, and even Bernard Shaw, and the little comedies of Irish life played by the Irish National Theatre, surprising though it may seem, are admirable material for amateurs. I once had the pleasure of seeing St John Hankin's *Charity that began at Home* played by the students of the Academy of Dramatic Art. They were only students of the secondary class ; but the performance was

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delightful. The extreme naturalness of the dialogue, situations, characterisation, etc., simplified the actors' problems, and the result was a performance which charmed and interested in spite of its many faults, faults that were to be expected. On the other hand, a performance of the third act of *The Gay Lord Quex*, an artificial comedy if ever there was one, by the more advanced students, was not nearly so entertaining to the audience, though perhaps better adapted to its purpose, namely, that of showing the technical proficiency of certain students who had completed their course.

Amateurs do not, or should not, put on plays for the sake of showing what they can do, so much as of giving entertainment, and for that purpose the natural school is to be recommended—plays, in short, which play themselves. The old classical comedies are not as a rule good plays for amateur actors. Shakespeare, on the other hand, is always effective, if you do not give too much of him. An entire Shakespeare play is almost too much for any amateur society, but I have seen the most interesting renderings of certain

scenes. In the selection of these the same care should be taken as in the case of plays. Showy scenes, beloved of the star actor, will not do. Mark Antony's oration over Cæsar, Cardinal Wolsey's downfall, Buckingham's farewell, Henry V. at Agincourt, are all popular pitfalls. On the other hand, the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice*, the play scene from *Hamlet*, the banquet scene from *Macbeth*, the senate house or conspirators' scenes from *Julius Cæsar*, all, if well stage-managed with a sufficiently strong company, yield some surprisingly good results when played by amateurs, and, as a rule, the larger the company the better the result.

Some of the Shakespearean duets, too, play the actors well if they are content to let them do so. The quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius, some of the love duets of Macbeth and his Lady (!), Beatrice and Benedict, Richard and Lady Anne, Henry V. and Kate, have all possibilities that the amateur may reach; but the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, the scenes between Hamlet and his mother, Lear and the Fool on the heath, Macbeth and the Gentlewoman,

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and many, many others in the repertoire of this marvellous writer, all touch both the highest peaks and profoundest depths of art, and if the amateur is a genuine amateur, in the highest sense of the word, he will never lay hands on such scenes as these, but will be content to be modest in his claims upon everyone's consideration.

The Shakespearean comedies do not as a whole commend themselves to the amateur, though parts of them are admirably suited. They—especially the clownish parts—require very consummate acting. Shakespeare's comedy must *not* be "clowned" or overdone. That is a mistake often made by amateurs and professionals alike. It has the effect of making the clowns appear very dull dogs, which, in point of fact, they are, for Shakespeare is the humourist, not the clown. Dogberry doesn't think he's funny, he thinks he's clever, and therein lies the humour of the situation. If you doubt what I say, next time that some yokel is unconsciously amusing you, let him see you think him a funny dog, and see what happens.

The easiest of Shakespeare's comedies for

the amateur to make some sort of a show in, are, I should think, *Twelfth Night*, or *The Taming of the Shrew*, with some parts of *Much Ado about Nothing*.

A Midsummer Night's Dream and *As You Like It*, which are probably the most popular, especially as pastorals, are certainly the most difficult, the delicate art required to bring out their subtle witchery and charm being a thing rarely found even in professionals.

Comic opera, musical plays, and musical comedies are all very fair game for the amateurs, many more of whom can sing or dance charmingly than can act. Moreover, a little singing or dancing goes farther than the same proportion of acting.

When getting up theatricals, amateurs are often in the habit of putting the cart before the horse, in first choosing their play, then their company, then their theatre. As a rule it is better for them to make certain of their company first, then see what sort of a stage they can secure or rig up, and finally choose a play that will fit in best with all these conditions. If they cannot run to a pro-

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fessional producer, they should be careful to see that the stage-manager's authority, whoever he may be, is properly upheld ; or, if unsatisfactory, removed altogether. Too many cooks are certainly fatal with this sort of broth. It is wise also to get help when making-up from someone accustomed to the use of grease paints. At the same time, do not let him have it all his own way, but give him some idea of the sort of thing that you want. Do not let the professional maker-up ride roughshod over your face with his stereotyped idea of what the part ought to be.

Always be most particular about having a dress rehearsal, and accustom yourselves early to rehearsing with your properties. Know your lines thoroughly long before the dress rehearsal, and never *wing* them : that is to say, run over them to yourself in the wings just before going on to play the part. Such a proceeding is far more likely to shake confidence than establish it. Don't screw yourself up with Dutch or Scotch courage, and don't be afraid of making a fool of yourself. The man who is afraid of doing that, on or off the stage, is lost.

Finally, remember that you are an amateur and that he to whom acting is a very serious business is almost certain to know more about the practicabilities of the game than you do, just as a professional photographer will know better than an amateur how far an ounce of hypo will go.

CHAPTER IX

SCIENTIFIC VOICE PRODUCTION

BY FREDERICK JAMES

ELOCUTION is the art of correctly expressing the thoughts and emotions of mankind by speech accompanied by gesture. To Hermes or Mercury is ascribed the invention of articulate sounds and the elaboration of language, and the theory that there was a common origin for all languages is strongly supported by many eminent men, amongst them Professor Max Müller.

The Greeks received their culture from the Egyptians through the ancient race of Pelasgians. The Athenian orator attained great eminence, and even to the present day such names as Isocrates, Pericles, Demosthenes, and Æschines are regarded as the

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great examples to be followed in the cultivation of the art of oratory.

In the Roman Empire we find that oratory was cultivated as a very important side of public life, and the homage accorded to such an orator as Cicero indicates the importance with which the subject was regarded.

From the Middle Ages down to modern times there has been a gradual decline in the art of speaking, people generally relying more on the written than the spoken word.

The art of speaking may be divided into three parts :

1. *Phonation*, or the art of producing vocal sound, which includes audibility and resonance, which is the reinforcement of voice by the various ventricles and organs of the body.

2. *Orthophony*, or true sound, which can be divided into five divisions : syllabication, accuracy, firmness, fluency, and deliberation.

3. *Expression*, which may be subdivided into *pitch*, which is a quality dependent on the rapidity with which the sound waves or vibrations follow each other ; *inflection* and *gesture*, which explain themselves.

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All the foregoing are dependent upon the mind, the emotions, and various organs of the body.

It will be necessary to give a short account of the various organs which combine their action to generate sound. For a fuller elaboration on this aspect of the subject, the reader is referred to any of the standard works on anatomy.

The chest, lungs, bronchial tubes, and trachea form the *motor element*, and the larynx, consisting of the laryngeal cartilage, vocal ligaments, and muscles, forms the *vibratory element*.

The chest or thorax consists of a framework covered by numerous muscles and membranes, the osseous portion formed by twenty-four ribs, twelve on each side, and attached to the spinal column by the breast bone or sternum. The ribs are clothed with muscles by which they are expanded and contracted, called the inner intercostal and outer intercostal muscles. There is only one abdominal muscle, called the diaphragm or midrib, a fan-shaped structure which separates the thoracic cavity from the abdomen. The

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chest contains the lungs, bronchial tubes, and heart.

The lungs.—These constitute the bellows of the vocal apparatus; they are two light spongy masses situated in the upper part of the trunk and surrounded by a tough double fold called the pleura. The right lung is larger than the left and has three distinct lobes, while the left has but two, and has in its anterior a hollow into which is inserted the apex of the heart. The bronchi, or branches, extend from the lungs into the trachea.

The trachea or windpipe.—This is about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and at the upper parts of the throat undergoes expansion and modification. It consists of a series of some twenty cartilaginous rings; the upper part forms the larynx.

The larynx or voice-box.—This consists of five principal cartilages, namely, the epiglottis, the thyroid cartilage, cricoid cartilage, and two arytenoid cartilages.

The epiglottis is the highest cartilage and stands erect against the back of the tongue above and in front of the other parts of the

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larynx ; it is the cover and protects the larynx from the entrance of foreign matter.

The thyroid cartilage is the largest ; it is called the cover shield or tension cartilage and forms the front and sides of the larynx. It is quite open behind where its wings terminate in rounded margins, which are prolonged upwards and downwards into four horns ; inside are attached the vocal ligaments, the front of the cartilage forming the projection known as the "Adam's apple."

The cricoid cartilage is very like a signet ring, the thick part behind and the slender half hoop in front, just under the lower edge of the thyroid cartilage, where a chink exists between the two.

The arytenoid cartilages are a pair and form two small irregular three-sided pyramids, about half an inch in height, the bases resting on the cricoid cartilage.

The vocal bands, reeds, cords, or ligaments.
—To these all the other structures are subservient ; they consist of pearly elastic tissues attached behind to the vocal processes of the arytenoid cartilages, and in front to the thyroid cartilage. The span between them is called

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the glottis. The upper surfaces of the vocal ligaments are flat, and to give them breadth deep hollows are scooped out in the fleshy part of the larynx, called ventricles. The upper edges of these are thickened and are generally called false vocal cords.

The laryngeal muscles are called intrinsic and extrinsic muscles.

The organs which merely modify sound :— The pharynx, mouth, and nose with its cavities, also the soft palate, lower jaw, and epiglottis.

The pharynx extends from the upper part of the larynx to the base of the skull. Its dimensions vary. Four and a half inches from top to bottom is about the average.

The nose may be regarded as a collection of tubes, each nostril being separated into three channels.

The soft palate is attached to the back of the hard palate and hangs down towards the back of the tongue. From its centre depends the uvula. The pillars of the fauces are two ridges of muscle, and between them lie the large glands called tonsils.

The articulating instrument.—This consists

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of tongue, lips, teeth and lower jaw, and soft palate.

Having given this brief description of the organs of voice, we will now touch upon their functions.

The first essential in the correct production of voice is correct breathing. Much has been said and written on this subject, and many systems advocated by the different schools of voice production. The three most in vogue are—

The clavicular, or shoulder breathing.

The costal, or rib breathing.

The abdominal, or deep breathing.

The two first methods it is not necessary to discuss at great length, as they are condemned by many of the best authorities on the subject. Clavicular breathing is the endeavour to fill the lungs by raising the shoulders, and costal breathing to accomplish the same purpose by the expansion and contraction of the ribs.

These methods are condemned because it is not possible to fill the lungs to the fullest extent, nor to compress that air obtained by them.

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Abdominal, deep, diaphragmatic or epigastric breathing is physiologically correct, for by this method of breathing the lungs are filled to their utmost capacity, and the necessary motor element can be given by slight contraction of the abdomen, thus raising the diaphragm and giving the necessary compression to the air within the lungs.

As an example of perfect breathing it is only necessary to watch a young infant; it will be noticed that it breathes without muscular effort or fatigue, and the point of vibration is situated about the centre of the region known as the solar plexus.

The inhaled breath, which should always be drawn through the nose, in its descent presses upon the diaphragm, the fan-shaped muscle which divides the thoracic cavity from the abdominal region: this distends the abdomen; the two floating ribs are then pushed outwards, and the breath passing upwards expands the chest.

When as much breath as possible has been taken in, the abdomen must be slightly withdrawn. This produces pressure upon the diaphragm, forcing it upwards, and thus giv-

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ing the motor power for the production of voice.

Some teachers advocate the complete and permanent distension of the abdomen—an incorrect method, and one to be avoided because of its tendency to produce unsightly figures, without producing any result that cannot be otherwise obtained.

The importance of deep breathing can readily be realised when it is known that the lungs contain six hundred million air cells, all capable of use in the process of breathing.

It would be preferable to describe this method as complete breathing rather than deep, as it necessarily includes the costal and clavicular movements.

All inhalations should be through the nose, for two reasons: the first being that only by such practice can the nasal cavities be kept open; and, secondly, the air outside the body requires to be raised to the same temperature as that within: this is accomplished by its passage through the nasal channels.

Many serious throat and nasal troubles can be avoided by discarding the bad habit of mouth breathing.

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Three practical breathing exercises :—

1. Inhale a deep breath silently and slowly through the nose, and exhale with the mouth closed.
2. Inhale *slowly* through the nose, retain the breath three seconds, and exhale swiftly through the mouth.
3. Inhale *swiftly* through the nose, retain the breath ten seconds, and exhale slowly through the mouth.

These three exercises practised regularly every day before breakfast and bedtime for ten minutes, preferably in the open air, will produce perfect control of the breath. The exercises should be continued until they can be practised without muscular fatigue ensuing.

Tone.—Tone is produced by means of the resonators, and by the vibration of the vocal ligaments set up by the percussion of the compressed air upon the glottis: this is known as the “coup de glotte,” or shock of the glottis.

High tone is produced by the extension of the vocal ligaments, the muscles simultaneously raising the larynx, thus causing practically a shortening of the tube. The lower

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tones are produced simply by the lowering of the larynx, producing a greater length of tube. An important point to remember is that these ligaments can only be stretched seven semi-tones, a constant quantity in all voices.

The stretching of the vocal ligaments produces the registers, and the normal tension of the speaking voice is the highest note of the lowest register. It is sometimes said that a person has strained the vocal cords; but nature has rendered this quite impossible, for if once the vocal ligaments were strained, speech would never again be possible. What actually occurs is that the laryngeal muscles are strained, thus causing relaxation of the ligaments and so conditioning loss of voice. This fatigue of the laryngeal muscles is frequently noticed amongst clergymen who improperly produce their voice; and the term clergyman's sore throat is the popular name given to such a condition.

Fulness of tone is obtained by the arched roof of the mouth and the nasal sinuses. The depth of the arch varies with each individual; some are fortunately in possession of a very high arched roof and are thus able to

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produce naturally a greater volume of sound than one with a flat roof.

The nasal sinuses, or perhaps I should say sini, are cavities in the bones about the nose. There are five, viz., frontal, maxillary, mastoid, sphenoidal, and ethmoidal. When these are kept free and unimpeded, by correct nasal breathing, a marked difference of vocal resonance is observed. It is particularly necessary to keep the frontal sinus, situated behind the root of the nose, perfectly clear from all obstruction.

For the production of full clear tones, the tongue must be flat in the mouth, the soft palate must be raised, and the frontal sinus kept open.

Too much stress cannot be laid upon these three points, and the neglect of one or all of them is the direct cause of a large amount of the indistinct speaking of the English people.

The difference in the production of voice in countries where the climate is warmer is very noticeable; there is not the imperative need for such rigorous attention to closed mouths in lands where daily sunshine is the rule and not the exception.

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The finest methods extant for the production of pure, clear, resonant tones are found in the Italian school; and Cattaneo, the great teacher of the art, founded his system upon the principles taught by Porpora as far back as 1689. The fundamental principle of Porpora and all professors of that school is the perfect production of the *Ah* sound, and it is sufficient recommendation for the efficacy of such training to know that many of the world's greatest singers have been developed by this method, notably, Gabrielli, Caffarelli, and Farinelli.

Belonging more to the artistic side of the art of oratory is quality of tone. Quality must not be confused with purity of tone. The latter is attained by definite scientific methods, but quality is that which gives individuality to the speaker. The question is often asked, "Can the individual quality of tone be improved upon or altered in any way?" and the answer is a qualified affirmative: that is to say, a hard raucous voice can certainly be modified and made less unpleasant. There are two methods by which this can be done; but it will be first

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necessary to point out certain peculiarities in the quality of tone. When, for instance, the lower C is struck on a pianoforte, a number of other tones are heard, called over-tones or partials, many seconds, fifths, octaves, and so on, right up the keyboard.

It is by the predominance of the odd and even partials that the quality of tone is varied, and by the emphasis or reduction of either by a skilled teacher a modulation of a person's voice may be obtained.

There is a second method which can be used by everyone, and that is by gesture; and here it may be remarked that gesture does not necessarily mean the waving about of the limbs: a movement of a muscle of the face is as much a gesture as the most violent spasmodic jerk of the body. Operatic singers, when producing difficult high notes, have a habit of slightly raising the cheek-bones, thus forming a half smile. By this means the note is produced easily and the tones are sweeter. This movement of the facial muscles involves a definite scientific principle, for by raising the larynx the tube is slightly shortened. In a similar manner

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frowning and rigidity of the muscles, by their action on the nervous system, produces varying tones: a wooden face means a wooden tone. To learn to use every part of the body in speaking is essential; yet the very first principle in the art of elocution is to cultivate repose; then, too, to acquire the habit of speaking slowly. These two essentials naturally obtained, "all other graces will follow in their proper places."

CHAPTER X

THE ACTORS' ASSOCIATION

BY CLARENCE DERWENT

THE Actors' Association, as its name implies, is a protective society which exists primarily for the purpose of regularising and, wherever possible, ameliorating the conditions under which actors and actresses carry out their work.

Inaugurated in 1890, largely through the influence and initiative of Mr F. R. Benson, the A. A. has had a not unchequered career ; but that it supplies a real need to the profession is clearly demonstrated by the fact that it has successfully weathered all storms, and last year celebrated its coming of age with every sign of prosperity and growing membership.

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It may enable the reader to form a clearer idea of the sphere of utility which the Association is intended to occupy, if at the outset a brief survey is taken of its past history and the forces which produced the institution as we know it to-day.

The immediate aims of the founders were very modest, though the original articles of association show that much latitude was provided for ultimate expansion. For many years, however, the Association confined itself principally to war on the bogus manager and suppression of insanitary theatres. At this time a secretary and a small office were considered sufficient, and members utilised the Association principally as a postal address. There was an entire absence of what one may term the club element.

Later, however, as the membership grew, there arose a demand for more commodious premises, and by the raising of a debenture loan of some £500, the Council was enabled to take large and expensive offices in King Street, Covent Garden. A theatrical agency was started and has remained to this day.

The debenture debt has proved a sore drag

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on the Association, and about £250 still remains to be repaid.

At this time Sir Henry Irving was president, and most of the other leading actor-managers were either vice-presidents or ex-officio members of the Council.

It cannot be said, however, that the Association flourished. Expenditure annually exceeded income, and finally things became so bad that a Star Matinée of *The Merchant of Venice* was given at Drury Lane in aid of the funds, and realised about £800. This, however, proved but a temporary expedient, and it was not long before the Association was once again in difficulties, both financial and constitutional. A party had arisen, headed by Granville Barker, which, without perhaps intending it, was introducing a policy of trade unionism. Their main contention was that, being an Actors' Association, it should not contain employers of labour in the form of actor-managers.

At a famous general meeting at the Passmore Edwards settlement, presided over by Sir George Alexander, the reform party, as they styled themselves, failed to obtain a

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statutory (two-thirds) majority for their proposals; but none the less the feeling of the members was considered to be clearly shown, and the managers resigned *en bloc*. With them went many of the Association's staunchest supporters.

The reform party in power cannot be said to have fulfilled expectations. Granville Barker resigned, the fine premises in King Street were abandoned for small offices, changes were made in the staff, and the Association was conducted mainly on trade-union lines.

About this time the Actors' Union came into being. This was a registered trade union which, after a more or less ignoble career of about three years, sank into liquidation and disappeared.

The Association also declined, and though £300 was raised from the members by voluntary subscriptions, nothing seemed to arrest the shrinkage, and a dry rot set in which very nearly ended the existence of the A. A. A change of address to Regent Street checked the decay, and a campaign was set on foot in 1910 for the return of the

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actor-managers. After a stiff fight this was carried, and Sir Herbert Tree generously led the way by becoming president.

This proved the turning point, and from that day the Association has not looked back. At the coming of age dinner friendly speeches were delivered by Sir Herbert Tree, Sir George Alexander, Mr H. B. Irving, Mr Arthur Bouchier, and others, and the last traces of soreness disappeared.

This, then, is the position to-day, and it may be said that it is in every way a strong one. Financially the Association is sounder than at any previous time, and its prospects have never been better. The present membership is slightly over a thousand, but it must be confessed that this is not one-tenth of the entire profession.

The advantages which accrue to members are numerous, and are all covered by the annual subscription of 15s. In addition to four good club rooms at the corner of Piccadilly Circus, there is a large dining-room where dinners and teas may be obtained at an extremely low figure. There is also a rehearsal room which may be hired at 1s. an hour.

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Attached to the Association is a theatrical agency which negotiates on an average six or eight engagements a week.

All members are entitled to free medical advice throughout the United Kingdom, and many an actor and actress has been saved large doctors' bills by joining the Association.

Free legal advice is another great advantage of membership, and as protection of actors may be said to be the *raison d'être* of the Association, all serious disputes between artist and manager are taken up by the Council and decided either by arbitration, or, if necessary, the funds are employed for carrying the matter into the courts.

Every member on joining is presented with a book which, in addition to a list of doctors, names of members, a list of recommended lodgings in the provinces, and other useful information, contains a short record of all the important legal decisions which have at different times been delivered on theatrical matters.

The Association is largely used as a postal address, and all correspondence is forwarded

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to wherever the member may happen to be. It is unnecessary to emphasise the immense importance to the actor of a permanent address where managers can always be sure of finding him.

Such are a few of the more obvious advantages of membership; but the first and most important inducement to join should undoubtedly be the desire to assist the only institution (apart from charities) which exists to better the conditions of employment for actors and actresses.

Now a word as to the theoretical and practical aims of the Actors' Association. The provision of medical and legal advice, redressing of grievances, improvement of insanitary theatres, and extermination of the bogus manager, by no means exhaust the ultimate aims and scope of the A. A. These may be considered as important, but secondary, activities. The fundamental principle for which the Association, like every other protective society, may be said to exist, is the economic emancipation of the worker. At the present time the economic status of the actor can only be

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truthfully described as non-existent, and the conditions under which he performs his work chaotic. The stage is a vast republic. There are no social distinctions. The sometime baggage man who has graduated into leading parts rubs shoulders with the peer's daughter. Theoretically all is equality and talent the only passport, though it may be added that in the higher paths of the dramatic world—*i.e.* London—the absence of social status and its accompanying influence acts as a very powerful handicap. It will be necessary to return to this aspect of the actor's calling, but for the present it is not the social but the economic position of the actor that is under consideration.

In the first place, it should be noted that the actor's tenure of engagement is the most precarious, the most uncertain of any trade or profession in the world. If proof were needed, it would only be necessary to point to the fact that length of engagement is dependent on such unstable factors as the ever-varying taste of the public, whims of the managers, state of the weather, trade prosperity, political atmosphere, etc. It

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might be expected that so hazardous a livelihood would have many economic compensations, but this is far from being the case.

Unlike any other trade, every course of paid work is preceded by a period (of no fixed duration) in the course of which hours and hours are given up to labour of a particularly hard and wearing nature *without any payment whatsoever*. This is the period of rehearsals. The hardship of giving six or eight (in some cases ten) weeks' rehearsals for the purpose of receiving—in the case of a failure—a fortnight or three weeks' pay is too obvious to need comment.

The removal of this anomaly is one of the main reforms for which the Association is fighting, and a start has already been made by the acceptance at His Majesty's Theatre of the principle of payment for rehearsals.

Another grave scandal which has long occupied the attention of the Council is the question of matinées. For some unexplained reason a custom has sprung up in the profession whereby an extra performance given in the afternoon is not paid for at all.

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This is curious enough, but more curious still is the arrangement that if a second extra performance be given in the afternoon, the artist receives one-half of his ordinary evening's pay for the second matinée, and this in spite of the fact that the manager gets the full benefit of the afternoon's receipts—often considerably larger than the takings at night. The unreasonableness of this is patent. The Association claims a full evening's payment for every matinée given.

The two foregoing reforms are embodied, with many others, in what is known as the Standard Contract, drawn up by the Council in 1909. This has not yet been accepted by the managers' associations. It is a very moderate and equitable document, which is more than can be said of many existing theatrical contracts. Among other things, it abolishes the unjust custom whereby the manager is at any time free to dismiss an artist with a fortnight's notice, while the same privilege is denied to the artist. This unjust clause may be found in the majority of existing contracts, and it would be interesting to hear

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counsel's opinion as to the precise value of such an agreement in law.

It has been said that the Association wages incessant war on the bogus manager and agent. Advertisements may be seen every day in the daily papers for premium-paying amateurs, for ladies and gentlemen desiring introduction to the stage, and for dancers, singers, etc., for continental engagements. Ninety per cent. of these advertisements are fraudulent, and many are even worse, and are not so much a professional matter as a public scandal that should be dealt with by the police.

The bogus manager is occasionally the victim of adverse circumstances; but the Association aims at establishing a law, such as exists in Germany, which compels every person embarking on a theatrical enterprise to deposit in safe keeping a sum of money sufficient to cover all salaries for a given period. This wise provision saves many an actor and actress from being stranded and many a venturesome manager from losing his inadequate capital.

Mention should not be omitted of the Joint

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Arbitration Board, which, in conjunction with representatives of the Touring Managers' Association, has impartially adjudicated in many a dispute between actor and manager. In all these matters, however, it should be clearly understood that the Association acts purely as a protective society and not as a militant trade union. Its policy is in no way allied to trade-union methods. For instance, under no circumstances would a strike be attempted, partly, no doubt, for the reason that any such attempt would be foredoomed to failure, but also because it is recognised that, however effective, such methods are not adapted to the peculiar conditions of the actor's calling.

Apart from the larger aims, the Association is of assistance to the profession in many minor ways. It provides a list of apartments in all the more important towns, and acts in conjunction with the Actors' Church Union, thus enabling members at all times to have the services of a chaplain in any town they may be visiting.

Moreover, to the touring actor the A. A. is always a link with London—the Mecca of all

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artists. It is a convenient address for letters, a pleasant meeting place, and a useful information bureau, the secretary being at all times happy to supply information to any member of the profession.

Every actor and actress, whether in London or the provinces, should join the Actors' Association. It is the only organised body which represents the profession, and it is, moreover, the only means of obtaining redress from the numerous evils with which the profession has at present to contend.

It may be asked to what these evils are due? and though it does not come within the scope of this chapter to deal with the subsidiary causes, it may be said that all the troubles of the actor are primarily due to the one great evil—over-crowding. The supply is enormously in excess of the demand, and talent finds itself outstripped by influence. In London particularly, appearance finds a readier market than ability. Of late years there has been a great influx of well-to-do people who are only too willing to play parts without any remuneration whatever, and, needless to say, managers, with an eye on the

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stalls and the salary list, are only too happy to place them. The legitimate actor is thus denied the opportunity of showing what he can do, and the manager continues to lament the lack of talent. When buyer and seller are not in touch with one another, a stagnant market necessarily results, and the intermediaries or agents seem quite powerless to remedy this state of affairs.

The solution of the actor's troubles lies in an Association Diploma of Merit. At present no such passport of efficiency exists, but were the Association a body of ten thousand members, with a special committee composed of the highest in the profession, as in France, every actor and actress would be compelled to submit to a test of efficiency, and no manager would engage any person who did not hold the Association Diploma. Thus the parasitic element would be eliminated, the standard of acting raised, conditions of work bettered, and finally salaries would quickly readjust themselves to the altered conditions of increased demand and legitimate supply.

CHAPTER XI

ON CRITICS AND CRITICISM

FOR some reason or other the average actor's attitude towards criticism does not always seem to be what it should be, and is often one of open hostility. The younger actor sometimes seems to regard the critic as his natural enemy, whilst even the oldsters will often look askance at him. The truth of the matter is, however,—and there is no reason why it should be denied,—the critic is in intention and in fact the actor's best friend. No actor really desirous of learning his business can possibly afford to ignore the critics, nor can the critics afford to ignore such an actor. As a class of men critics are as a rule, like Lord Rosebery's Dukes, poor but honest, and the actor who is under the

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impression that some critic has especially and maliciously got his knife into him is generally labouring under a mild form of that self-centralisation that stocks lunatic asylums.

There are those also who will not accept criticism except from a master of their own art. This is surely not altogether sound, for whilst it may be admitted that the master of an art must be to some extent a good critic of that art, a good critic need not necessarily be a master-craftsman. Personally, I do not believe the critical and what is called the creative faculties are so clearly defined and differentiated as some aver, both being processes of selection. There is very likely some truth in the Johnsonian definition of a critic as a disappointed artist, but the disappointment often arises as much from laziness as incapacity, and surely the worthy burly doctor was himself a good example of this.

Then there is the criticism of the general public—the man in the street, who frankly admits that he is an ignoramus in matters of art and only knows what he wants, which is after all something. No actor can afford

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to ignore such a critic, because he represents the public to whom the actor is appealing. Molière realised this when he read his plays to his cook. Every form of art has its own especial peculiarities, and one of those of the acting art is that it has to make a very general appeal. Molière did not expect his cook to understand all he wrote, but he knew that unless there was enough there to keep her interest alive throughout the play, there was something wrong with it. A picture requires only one patron, but a drama thousands to support it. No actor who is really wise will be satisfied to abide by the criticism of one particular type of critic or criticism, but will see what *all* have to say, and, applying his own critical faculty to their criticisms, form his own conclusion. The man in the street represents the man in the audience upon whom the actor is seeking to produce a certain impression, and what that man has to say will be very good evidence as to whether the actor has succeeded or not.

To turn from the critic to criticism. It is surely part, and the more difficult part, of the

true function of criticism to point out and explain the virtues of a work of art to the uninitiated, as well as its faults. As I have said elsewhere in this book, ten minutes of the critic who can reveal and explain the hidden beauties of a work of art is worth ten years of the critic who can only expose its faults. Surely criticism should be constructive as well as destructive, and encourage and extend the growth of art. To attempt to form the artist solely, or even mainly, by a process of elimination is as fruitless as to attempt to reform the criminal by repeated processes of punishment. The garden of art must be watered and tended by the critic, and he must remember to water the flowers as well as uproot the weeds.

At the same time, the relationships existing between the actors and their critics are often very friendly, and the present writer had once the honour of being present at a dinner given by the whole theatrical profession to a doyen of dramatic critics, the late Mr Joseph Knight. But there has occasionally been a little unpleasantness, and it would be well for actors to realise that on every

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one of these occasions the least dignified attitude has been invariably taken up by the actor.

To resent unjust criticism is undignified, and the more unjust the criticism, the more undignified the resentment. To ignore criticism is small and has little dignity; to listen to it is the really dignified proceeding.

Whilst on the subject of dignity, actors would do well to realise that that is a department in which they are prone to be lacking. Thanks to the efforts of Sir Henry Irving and others, who worthily uphold the traditions, the stage is now a very dignified profession, and one which the King delights to honour.

The fact of the matter is, the actor has the defects of his qualities, and when he does everything for effect on the stage, is apt to do the same thing off it.

Such and such a manager has a great command of language. He does not mean all he says, but he says it so well that it appears to the outsider as if he did. Actors must remember the outsider and realise that whereas in the theatre the audience has no hesitation in letting the actor know what sort

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of effect he has produced, outside the theatre he may be at great pains to conceal it.

In the statue erected to Sir Henry Irving in the streets of London by his fellow-actors and patrons of the drama, he is wearing his academical robes. And this is fitly so, for the crowning achievement of his life was the official and academic recognition he obtained for the stage. It will also be noticed that he carries his chin in the air, a thing which, by the way, Sir Henry was never seen to do, physically speaking. But metaphorically he held his head very high; and if actors wish to erect an eternal monument to their great chief, they will do so too.

CHAPTER XII

THE STAGE AS A PROFESSION— A GENERAL SUMMARY

IN this chapter it is proposed to sum up generally some of the results and conditions of a successful career upon the stage, to see what rewards the profession has to offer, and the kind of existence to which its conditions necessarily bind its devotees. To do this it is probable that we shall go over ground that has already been traversed, to some extent, in the pages of this book; but a second journey will surely do no harm, and only help to familiarise travellers with the country.

It is as well to consider carefully the rewards and opportunities it offers to the man of ordinary intelligence and capacity, as well as to the genius, the latter being a

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being whose turn for a certain form of art is so strong within him that it becomes the dominating force, and he must pursue that path whether he live or starve. It is therefore rather to the former that these remarks are offered, the fruits of an observation extending over some years' experience, with ample opportunity of obtaining a good insight into the workings of a theatre, before and behind the curtain.

To begin with: no one need comfort himself with the idea that the stage is an easy profession, for for sheer hard work and grinding toil it would be hard to beat. Nobody is exempt from work, and plenty of it. The actor-manager, or manageress, at the top of the tree has, in addition to the cares and responsibilities of running a theatre, involving an expenditure of thousands of pounds, the difficult task of learning and studying and rehearsing big parts, sometimes, in these days of special matinées and Shakespearean revivals, as many as two or three a week. The man lower down the ladder, besides the care and the trouble of his own little bit—sometimes bits—has probably

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to be posted up in several different understudies, which are generally rehearsed two or three times a week, during the greater part of the run of a play. The man at the bottom of the tree, the extra gentleman walking on, or perhaps only saying, "The carriage waits, milord," will, if he wishes to get on in his profession, be busy most hours of the day, trotting round, interviewing managers, authors, producers, etc., working night and day to establish a "connection," and often rehearsing hard the while at a big part for a production at one or other of the innumerable societies and clubs for producing plays by unknown authors. Then there are the busy bees of a theatre, the toilers whose names do not appear, excepting, perhaps, in a footnote on the programme. First and foremost there is the stage-manager, with truly arduous duties, generally including the superintendence of forty, fifty, or perhaps more, hands, with each day's rehearsal, a hundred new commissions to execute in the way of scenery, furniture, props, etc., much thought and inventive power being required in the evolution of the latter.

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It is no uncommon thing for a stage-manager to be told that he must be ready with some noise to which he is quite a stranger, the distant rumbling of an avalanche or the breaking of the surf upon a coral reef, by the next rehearsal.

Then there is his assistant, a man who, as a rule, spends all his days and most of his nights at the theatre.

He generally includes among his other avocations the duties of the prompter. He has to be always on the spot, very much on it, during the production as well as the performance of the play, his being the duty to note down every situation, movement, and position of the characters in case of future reference and possible revivals.

He also directs the understudy rehearsals, and often is expected to read or play any part himself at a moment's notice. In fact, the assistant stage-manager has nowadays to fulfil, in addition to his other duties, the position which, in the old days, was known as "general utility."

Besides him some young actor in the cast, for a little extra remuneration, often fills the

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post of secretary to the principal actor or actress, or reader of plays to the management, neither of which positions can be described as an absolute sinecure.

Then, as the actor gets higher up the ladder, still harder work becomes the order of the day. Bigger parts have to be played. A reputation has to be kept up. Long queues wait outside the doors to see you, and expect to see you at your best. The critics keep a sharp look-out from the stalls, and watch, like pilots, for any hidden rocks that may be in your "channel."

Finally, you blaze out into a star of the first magnitude, a public character with the salary of a cabinet minister, and perhaps a secret longing for the days when you could call your soul your own on three pounds a week.

Now what, in hard cash, are the rewards that come to compensate one for the life of toil and stress? They are, as a rule, very, very small, very, very hardly earned, and very, very difficult to get.

Of the thousands and thousands of actors and actresses in these islands, I imagine that

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there are very few more than a couple of hundred who can point to a regular and unfluctuating income of two thousand a year, and this is including managers, authors, and all others for whom the stage is the source of income. Perhaps there are another two hundred who could point to a thousand, though I doubt it. After that some few may, perhaps, manage to touch £500. But the vast majority, the huge mass, have to support an existence, and sometimes that of a wife and family, and keep up a good appearance, on anything from one to four pounds a week, which, when in work, even if the man be more than usually fortunate, will probably not be for more than thirty or forty weeks in the year. I remember, some little time ago, speaking of an actor whose salary had attained the giddy height of anything from twenty-five to forty pounds a week. Mine, at that time, was the modest sum of £3; but I had been fortunate enough to be in a continuous engagement for three years, and a ten-pound note would have sufficed to cover the difference in the total amount we had both earned at that time!

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Of course, this is an extreme case, but extreme cases are alarmingly frequent in the theatrical profession.

The above are, briefly, the opportunities and conditions of life upon the stage. Let us take a look at the results of their successful accomplishment. Take first the instance of a really great success, the actor who has climbed right to the top of the tree, is enjoying wide popularity and the income of a cabinet minister, say a salary of a hundred pounds a week. What are the advantages of his position? First and foremost, of course, is the supreme advantage of pursuing, under its pleasantest conditions, the art that he loves, and the opportunities of playing great parts in great plays. Next come the advantages of his reputation, and the opportunities it gives him of coming into contact with those distinguished in literature, science, and art, of dining at the tables of the socially great and of mixing with aristocracy of blood and breeding as well as that of intellect, both of which have their advantages, whatever may be said against either of them. Then, too, he is in a position of patronage,

with great opportunities of assisting less fortunate brethren, friends, and relations in his own profession. To this, by the way, churlish objections are often raised, but it is surely only fair and just, and one of the rewards of the successful actor, that he should be able to grease the ways a little for deserving children, friends, or relatives. Unfair and undeserved greasing is another matter, and one that the public generally adjusts fairly promptly.

The monetary advantage, as I have already hinted, is not nearly so great as it looks, for the stage is such a precarious profession that the actor must, whatever his position, save a good deal if he wishes to provide for his family or enjoy the prospect of a peaceful and restful old age. His enormous popularity is scarcely likely to last for ever; at the same time, acting has the inestimable advantage of being one of those professions for which one can never grow too old. One can go on acting and improving as long as one has any faculties at all.

Then there is the advantage, if it be one, of being a public character, a notoriety,

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one to whom the public* finger will often point, and the public hands often applaud. That is very pleasant when you wish to be in the limelight, but not so when you don't; and there will be times when you won't.

So much for the advantages. For the disadvantages, just as a great position will give the actor opportunities of playing some of the greatest parts in the greatest plays, it will also give him plenty of chances of playing some very bad parts in some very bad plays; and a bad part is generally much longer and much harder to learn than a good one. His name and drawing power will be employed as a means to bolster up some rotten play, and he will not be able to resist trying to see if he can do it, with almost inevitable failure as the result.

But perhaps the greatest disadvantage of all is the tie that the stage puts upon all, and especially upon the successful actor. He will find himself tied down to a city life, whether he likes it or no, and the more popular he is, the less time he will have for holiday-making; for popularity is a very fickle jade, and apt to

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leave anyone in the lurch who does not pay her very constant attention.

The lower down the ladder, the fewer the advantages. Sooner or later most young men and women want to get married, and they cannot, or should not, do that without a certain amount of this world's goods. If the wife of an actor is an actress (and a very poor time of it she will have if she isn't, for the husband will generally be away when his wife wants him at home, and at home when she wants him out of the way) it will not always be easy to be certain of a joint engagement, which means a great deal of separation. And if there are children of the marriage, the inconveniences are multiplied, for maybe a third home has to be found for the child whilst the husband and wife are away on separate tours.

Moreover, nowhere is it more necessary than on the stage for husband and wife to have similar tastes. As already remarked in a previous chapter, the little pleasures and recreations of an actor's life are mostly to be had round little supper tables and in front at hospitable theatres—always glad to find

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seats, if they have them, for fellow-artists. Unless this sort of thing appeals to both parties, husband and wife on the stage are not likely to find their experiment very successful. But it sometimes does so, and some of the happiest marriages that have ever been made have been made in "*The Profession*."

These are some of the advantages and disadvantages of the actor's life. I have by no means mentioned all, but perhaps enough to show the would-be actor that the life is not all beer and spangles, and to cause him to hesitate and count the cost a little before setting foot in the enchanted land beyond the footlights. For it is enchanted. There is no doubt of that, though it may be many weary months, or even years, before the spell begins to work and the footlights to seem as warm and bright from behind as they did from in front of the curtain.

In conclusion, the author would like to say that these pages are not written by one who has been soured by failure or elated by success, but one whose lines, as far as his profession is concerned, have fallen in very

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even and pleasant places, from where he has been able to view, perhaps with an impartial and unprejudiced eye, the aspects of the stage as a profession, both from within and without.

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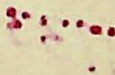
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